

SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE



3 2449 0407163 0

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from  
Lyrasis Members and Sloan Foundation





# The Creation of Congressman X

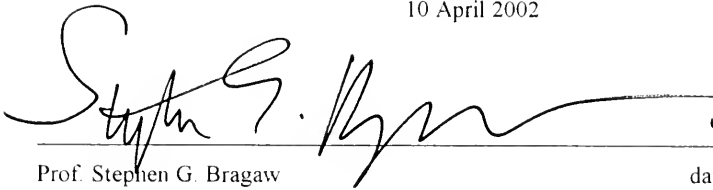
## A look at the Louisiana Congressional Delegation

A Senior Honors Thesis in the Department of Government and International Affairs,  
Sweet Briar College

Leigh A. Riddell

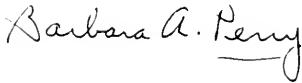
*Approved with Highest Honors*

10 April 2002

 4/10/02

---

Prof. Stephen G. Bragaw date



---

Prof. Barbara A. Perry date

---

Prof. Andrew E. Busch, University of Denver date



**Who is Congressman X?**





The role of the legislature in both national and state politics is utterly critical to the overall mechanics of American government. The United States Congress, in particular, is responsible for legislation that directly affects the lives of Americans, dealing with issues ranging from taxes to terrorism. More importantly, the very nature of American politics makes Congress the most fluid branch of government in the United States. Frequent elections, especially in the House of Representatives, create a Congress that is never stagnant and rarely settled. Through often-held and hard-fought elections, new members enter and old members leave the Congress with the regularity of public opinion shifts. The fact that members are elected as representatives of the states and do not campaign as national candidates creates an institution that is intensely varied in its opinions and needs.<sup>1</sup> However, in the same way that America's established system of government divides the legislature, that system also serves as Congress' unifying force. Because the system, and indeed the Constitution, requires that congressional careers are maintained through successful elections, members are unified in a mutual quest to protect their seats from all possible threats. The fact that reelection campaigns can serve as barometers of legislative success and job performance requires *all* members (except those few souls who have term limited themselves or are facing retirement) to focus equally on responding to constituencies and legislative building strong records.<sup>2</sup> They must divide their attention between constituent concerns, committee appointments, congressional norms and rules, controlling the media, and competing with the executive and judicial branches. Therefore, even as different members come and go, the system's unifying forces have enabled political scientists to create and defend a series of behavioral standards. Each old and new

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, both the term member and the term congressman will refer to members of the House and Senate. This is a common writing style used by respected political scientists such as David Mayhew.

David Mayhew. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). p.13, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> John R. Johannes. *To Serve the People: Congress and Constituency Service*. (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). p.187.



member, scholars have maintained, behaves in a predictable way that will enable him to maximize the benefits of his position.

The first step towards understanding Congress is understanding theory. Theory explains the reasons, the why, behind congressional actions and allows for behavioral predictions. The intended role of Congress (the one described in theory) is perpetually juxtaposed with the realistic role that Congress plays, but that does not negate the importance of political science theories. Instead, once political theory has been explained, it must be compared to the reality of applied congressional politics. This comparison offers a critical assessment of both scholarly theory and congressional behavior. This thesis will test the application of congressional theory to the members themselves. It will utilize a well-respected technique of political science. Beginning in earnest with Richard Fenno's single-candidate research, political scholars have recognized the validity of testing generic theories of Congress against the behavior of a single member.<sup>3</sup> In a slight twist, this thesis will do so against the behavior of a single state's delegation. Essentially, the popular maxims established by contemporary political scientists will be applied to the established behavioral patterns of Louisiana's delegation. The object is to determine whether congressmen can be labeled generic; that is, in reality, do members of Congress behave in a manner similar to that which is depicted in popular congressional literature, or are members independent actors of their own design, rarely falling into a cross-Congress mold? Do some members behave differently than congressional theory predicts based significantly on the state they represent? Despite the particulars of individual states, a collection of scholarly theories can be combined to create Congressman X, an individual that imitates members and successfully adapts to the congressional politics of any state. This generic member proves that loyalty to a particular state merely changes the actions of

---

<sup>3</sup>Richard Fenno. *Learning to Legislate: The Senate Education of Arlen Specter*. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1991)., Richard Fenno. *The Emergence of a Senate Leader: Pete Domenici and the Reagan Budget*. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1991)., and Richard Fenno. *The Making of a Senator: Dan Quayle*. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1989) are a few examples of Fenno's work that have utilized this technique.



each member, not the nature of the behavior itself. "Congressmen do not differ very much among themselves in the methods they use or the skills they display in attuning themselves to their diverse constituencies."<sup>4</sup> This statement demonstrates that congressmen will indeed behave in predictable ways to achieve predictable goals, despite the peculiar political culture of individual stables. In order to prove the existence of the generic congressman, the scholarly literature must first be examined and intertwined to create an individual that embodies most of the popular theories that have been developed by political scientists over the years. In essence, this chapter will answer the questions: Who is Congressman X?

Before a generic congressman can be created, however, it is important to understand that there is a wide gulf between the public perception of a congressman and the scholarly one. Political scientists predict a different type of behavior than typically characterizes public expectations. It is important to acknowledge that this thesis will refer exclusively to scholarly expectations of behavior, even as it extrapolates how the public may *want* their representatives to behave. Chris Matthews' virtual handbook to congressional behavior, *Hardball*, perhaps best illuminates the distinctions between what scholars study and what the public assumes: "Expect a raging egotist, entrenched by his own affairs, and you are seized with the unfamiliar pleasure of having someone probe with quick interest at your own most intimate longings, plotting your course even before you have done so for yourself. Expect to be wooed with favors, and he captures you instead with a breathtaking *request*. Expect an argument, and you are blinded by the quick concession; yes you are right on the larger "principle"-- it is the smaller, more tangible points that seem to interest him."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, while popular desire is a critical tool for explaining congressional behavior, the behavior that will be illuminated and applied to

---

<sup>4</sup>David Mayhew. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). p.69.

<sup>5</sup>Chris Matthews. *Hardball: How Politics is Played, Told by One that Knows the Game*. (New York: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 1988). pp.15-16.



members in this thesis stems from scholarly theories, not documented public assumptions.

The bridge that connects general congressional theory to state-specific politics is always elections. Elections, like all aspects of congressional behavior, are entirely about strategy. An individual running for office must concern himself with several different things at one time. First and foremost, he must forge a relationship with his potential voting base. This means maintaining favorable relations with his intimate constituency, his allies of ideological and party affiliation, and the increasingly prominent moderates of his region. He must learn to build a coalition of voters that can serve as his primary base of support. When the expectations of those voters change, a candidate must identify this mood swing and modify his legislative platform around these changes. There are differences between House and Senate elections, just as there are differences between state and regional desires, and election coalitions necessarily reflect these differences. Senate elections require a statewide coalition, whereas voters in House elections prefer a candidate whose loyalties are promised to the district alone. Elections, therefore, test a candidate's ability to assume the varying roles voters expect him to play.

In the world of congressional politics, a congressman is created before he ever enters the U.S. Capitol Building. In *Political Ambition: Who Decides to Run for Congress*, scholars Linda Fowler and Robert McClure do not develop a generic congressman, but rather a generic candidate instead. Using standards of the electoral process, that is researching the opportunity, money, party support, and general ambition afforded to certain individuals, the authors were able to determine who would, and would not, run for political office. Demonstrating a measure of respect to their professed mentor Richard Fenno, Fowler and McClure utilized the single-candidate study technique by spotlighting two new members of the House of Representatives from the 30th District of New York.<sup>6</sup> Their admitted goal was to "paint portraits of one or two politicians whose

---

<sup>6</sup> McClure and Fowler mention Professor Richard F. Fenno, Jr. in the dedication to *Political Ambition*. The book also includes a note on interviewing methods, explaining that "this book is based to a large extent on





backgrounds, ways of thinking, and considered actions make them ideal, flesh-blood spokespersons for accepted theories or trends in the nation's politics. By using these local politicians in this way we try to show how abstract ideas have living referents who daily go about their communities making democracy work."<sup>7</sup>

Who, then, made up the bulk of these "living referents?"<sup>8</sup> According to Fowler and McClure's assessment, candidates must first have the opportunity to devote an enormous amount of time and energy to the campaign's success. Candidates must consider the realities of the world they live in, known as the context of the campaign, and assess the risks or benefits that particular times and places place on individual campaigns. Therefore, candidates must perceive themselves as involved in the issues of the day and their district and willing and able to devote their time, money, and strength to the resolution of such issues. "At a minimum, a bona fide congressional aspirant is someone interested in local and national affairs, who tolerates living simultaneously in sharply different worlds and who navigates through life without intimate personal connections (or lives in a family that can withstand great stress and long separations)."<sup>9</sup> Additionally, there are certain remnant characteristics of candidates from the past that Fowler and McClure admit are still applicable today. This means that *most* successful candidates for the United States Congress are white, male, former members of state legislatures whom the parties feel are capable of amassing the huge amount of money necessary to launch a successful campaign.<sup>10</sup> Party interest is a critical aspect of each candidate's campaign strategy and when choosing a potential candidate the parties themselves focus on a similar assessment of success that Fowler and McClure have created.

---

interviews. The method used to conduct them [was] inspired by that employed by Richard Fenno in his studies of Congress..."

Linda L. Fowler and Robert D. McClure. *Political Ambition: Who Decides to Run for Congress*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). Introduction, xiii.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p.12.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p.225.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p.102.



However, what is perhaps more enlightening than who the parties will choose as their next candidate are the potential candidates who never attempt to run for office. In order to expound on the theory that certain types of people, who embody certain behavioral and social characteristics, are more likely to run for the United States Congress, the authors emphasize the deterrents that prevent otherwise qualified individuals from pursuing elected office. *Political Ambition* focuses a lot of attention on those individuals who choose deliberately *not* to run for office. This is mainly because several people who consider campaigning but never actually declare their candidacy are close replicas of those who do. What is crucial, therefore, is the determination of why those people never choose to run. These may be individuals unwilling to devote the time away from family and household necessary to run a campaign. The “unseen candidates,” however, are more often those who ultimately lack success most crucial component: ambition. Fowler and McClure maintain that “ambition for a seat in the House, more than any other factor-- more than money, personality, or skill at using television, to name just a few examples-- is what finally separates a visible, declared candidate for Congress from an unseen one. Even among declared candidates, it is the force of ambition that most often turns up as the critical difference between the winners and the losers, because only intense motivation can overcome the high political, personal, and financial hurdles that law and custom impose in a politician’s path to a seat in the U.S. Congress.”<sup>11</sup>

This emphasis on ambition, a difficult thing to measure through application and yet one that cannot be left out of any study of Congress, is reiterated in Douglas Arnold’s, *The Logic of Congressional Action*. Arnold argues that individual members carry their startup ambition into their service and apply it to all following attempts at reelection. Desire for reelection, and the ambition that drives it, is Congressman X’s most typical, recognizable, and universal attribute. The focus on reelection, and how that focus shapes congressional

---

<sup>11</sup>ibid. p.2.



behavior, cannot be overstated. If there is any generic assertion to be made about members of Congress it is that reelection is a member's dominant focus. This fact is the basis of Arnold's book but is widely recognized by political scientists nearly across the board. According to Arnold, reelection is every congressman's career, their livelihood, and very often their obsession. Every piece of legislation that is proposed, every baby that is kissed, every vote that is cast, and every Academy recommendation that is written increases the possibility of achieving the "fundamental goal" of Congress: keeping one's seat.<sup>12</sup> Morris Fiorina maintains that members, especially those in marginal districts where their seat is unsafe, live with the fear that "one mistake on a roll-call vote, one slip of the tongue, one touch of scandal, an unpopular presidential candidate put forward by his party or a popular one by the opposition-- any such factor might return him to the law office in the county seat."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, members must consider the electoral consequences of every action. Those who live in marginal districts, areas where the past election race was closely contested, must do all within their power to establish their seat as one that is "safe." Those already in the comfort of a safe seat must work to keep it such. Therefore, the following discussion on congressional behavior will "hinge on the assumption that United States congressmen are interested in getting reelected-- indeed in their role here as abstractions, interested in nothing else."<sup>14</sup>

It seems obvious that members would focus on reelection. After all, most Americans are dedicated to maintaining their job. The emphasis on reelection, however, is extremely critical to this thesis because it explains political behavior. Each member must "solve for himself the greatest of all problems facing a first-term Congressman— how to become a second-term Congressman."<sup>15</sup> Members learn to behave in ways that are most

---

<sup>12</sup>R. Douglas Arnold. *Congress and the Bureaucracy: A Theory of Influence*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). p.27.

<sup>13</sup>Morris P. Fiorina. *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). p.14.

<sup>14</sup>Mayhew. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. p.13.

<sup>15</sup>Nelson W. Polsby, ed. *Congressional Behavior*. (New York: Random House Publishing, 1971). p.135.



likely to advance their ability to achieve reelection. If it is accepted, as nearly all of the scholarly literature used in this thesis accepts, that reelection is the proximate goal of every congressman, then it must be determined whether behavior focused on reelection is the same for all or is reelection achieved in different ways according to the variables created by the different demands of individual states.

Congressional behavior is dominated by incumbents seeking reelection. Congressman X is invariably a professional legislator. Very few members have term limited themselves and retirement happens infrequently enough that it does not have a dominant effect on the norms of congressional behavior. Political scientists have attempted to describe the benefits of incumbency and how those benefits shape congressional behavior. In “political-science-speak,” members either serve in a safe or a marginal district. Safe districts are areas in which a member can expect few challenges to his seat and is able to maneuver his own political agenda comfortably. Marginal districts are those in which a member expects to be challenged in upcoming campaigns and are generally the districts served by newer, less established members. Incumbency, in fact, serves as a strong guarantee of future electoral success. “Since World War II, on average, 92 percent of all incumbent representatives and 75 percent of incumbent senators running for reelection have been returned to office.”<sup>16</sup> Incumbents wield an enormous amount of power over the political system because they are able to become career congressmen, overcoming political opponents by utilizing their time in office to benefit themselves and their reelection goals. The power of incumbency is so strong that often times it has served to dilute any future campaigns.<sup>17</sup> Incumbent victory is seemingly automatic, making the opposing party unwilling to support a strong candidate in opposition. As a member increases his years of service he further protects himself from worthy political opponents.

---

<sup>16</sup>Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek. *Congress and Its Members*. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1990), 59.

<sup>17</sup>Burdett A. Loomis. *The Contemporary Congress*. (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2000). p.66.





This power of incumbency was heavily challenged by the Contract with America when the Republicans took control of the House of Representatives. However, it took a broad, national platform to finally defeat the Democrat incumbents and Republican incumbents are learning to similarly use their status to protect their seats. One of the most critical aspects to understanding congressional behavior thus lies in determining how a member uses his incumbency status to protect his seat.

If it is true that members of Congress are responsible for governing the nation, but rarely turn their attention away from election strategies, then every facet of their behavior can be explained in relation to reelection needs. Political scientists have thus applied a rational choice theory to their studies of Congress, understanding that the decision to behave in a certain way is based on an assessment of how that behavior will positively affect an incumbent's reelection goals. "Individuals, called *legislators*, seek to achieve certain ends through their legislative activity."<sup>18</sup> The decision to vote yes or no, to go home or stay in Washington, DC, to go against the party, or to join a committee are all attempts to move closer to successful reelection. Very little is done in Congress without consideration of how action will affect a member's future goals. This should not imply that members never vote their conscience; instead, it should simply explain that when members do, in fact, vote their conscience, they do so with the knowledge that every vote could advance or disrupt their political plans. This theory of rational choice opens congressmen to compromise because it allows them, according to spatial voting theory, to accept alternatives that are at least close to their own policy preferences.<sup>19</sup> Congressmen who personally and openly support a particular piece of legislation would rather see a compromise that is close to the original policy initiative than irreparable death. If a bill is killed it becomes the antithesis of rational choice theory because a dead bill does nothing to

---

<sup>18</sup>Charles Stewart III. *Analyzing Congress*. (New York: WW Norton and Co., 2001).

p.6.

<sup>19</sup>*ibid.* p.47.



advance a member's reelection goals. A bill that is compromised into a suitable version of the original, however, can be spun to appear even better than the idea was at conception. Compromise works for all members of Congress because it allows them to always focus their behavior around their personal goals, while at the same time preventing those goals from eliminating actual progress on Capitol Hill.

When attempting to understand rational choice theory in relation to congressional behavior it is important to realize that while reelection is undoubtedly the primary aim of all members, there are other, less consuming goals that have some impact on congressional behavior. These secondary goals may include influence, status, the chance to participate in the creation of sound policy, or the ability to create a forum for particular areas of expertise.<sup>20</sup> Some members may even regard their service within the Congress as a stepping-stone to higher positions. In the typical course of events, state legislatures are vehicles to move towards the U.S. Congress, the House of Representatives a necessary step before movement into the Senate, and the Senate a training ground for presidential candidates, cabinet officials, and state governors. Despite the existence of these other goals, however, they revolve around the primary goal of reelection. Influence, status, participation, and expertise cannot be created if a member is no longer in office. Furthermore, a member whose long-term goals are set on another branch of political service is continually focused on positive electoral returns. It is very hard to move from the House to the Senate if a member loses a House election first. Rational choice decision-making advances the potential to achieve these alternate goals in the same way it aids in reelection. Rational choice theory, when applied to any objective, simply requires that an individual, in this case a legislator, behave in a way best suited to the ultimate achievement of his goals.

Incumbents and other congressional candidates are not the only political actors who

---

<sup>20</sup>Barbara Sinclair. *The Transformation of the US Senate*. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). p.3.



utilize rational choice theory. In fact, voters, democracy's most important political actors, vote based on a rational assessment of a candidate's ability to promote their best interests. Scholars have developed a cost-benefit analysis that illustrates when voters choose to vote. This analysis maintains that voters intentionally weigh the benefits of voting against the costs of not voting to determine whether or not they will turn out to vote.<sup>21</sup> This Mancur Olson analogy to political participation is especially important in understanding Congress because voters do not only use cost-benefit analysis when considering whether or not to vote.<sup>22</sup> They also employ this psychological strategy when deciding which candidate will win their approval. When choosing a candidate, most voters consider the costs and benefits that the policy platform of a particular candidate will impose on their daily lives. They then select the candidate whose platform has most minimized the costs and maximized the positive benefits for constituents. It is essential to a candidate's election success that he investigate, and then openly support, the reforms his constituents think work towards their best interests. A member's own rational choice behavior is thus bound to the rational choice expectations of the voting public.

Incumbency status is maintained through a number of different mechanisms, each utilized by congressmen for the specific purpose of protecting the safety of their seat. Some may seem incredibly simplistic. Former Speaker of the House Bankhead (D-AL) claimed, "Members get reelected term after term without substantial opposition because they give close and prompt attention to the mail."<sup>23</sup> Most of the tactics used to insure reelection, however, are more complex than attention to the mail. One of the most

---

<sup>21</sup>Stewart. *Analyzing Congress*. p.169.

<sup>22</sup>This analogy refers to the groundbreaking work of Mancur Olson. His book, *The Logic of Collective Action*, was not used specifically in this thesis because his central point is concerned more with organized popular groups than congressional behavior and other scholars, such as Charles Stewart III, have directly applied his theories to Congress. However, it seemed important to acknowledge the original source of this theory.

Mancur Olson. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>23</sup>Polsby, ed. *Congressional Behavior*. p.29.



important benefits of incumbency is the ability to create a voting history. Roll call votes in both the Senate and the House are readily available to public consumption (especially in today's technology age of online access). Though voting records are often used to wound a political candidate, they are also one of incumbents' most effective weapons in achieving their goals. Roll call records allow incumbents to appear intimately involved in the passage of popular legislation or, perhaps more importantly, in the failure of an unpopular bill. As one congressman put it, "the only way the people have of knowing what you are doing when the chips are down is what the recorded votes are."<sup>24</sup> The Congress of congressional record is the one voters recognize, even if roll call records obscure the reality of what went on before a bill's passage or failure. Members are consistently cognizant of the ramifications of their voting records.<sup>25</sup> Rational choice theory is perhaps most applicable here because there are numerous outside pressures on congressmen that influence legislative votes. Personal beliefs, expertise, constituent popularity, and party lines each affect a member's decision to vote in a certain direction. Rational choice theory is even more appropriately applied to long-time incumbents. Incumbents who have served in Congress for a significant period of time have the two-fold advantage of being able to utilize roll call records to their advantage as well as the development of greater voting independence as voters become more and more convinced of their congressman's indispensability.

Typical research on Congress revolved around a member's rational choices in Washington, DC within the Capitol doors. Political scientists poured over roll call votes, committee assignments, leadership appointments, and political negotiation as if they were in some way separate from and more important than a congressman's behavior in his district. Richard Fenno, however, introduced a new dynamic to the study of legislative

---

<sup>24</sup>Julius Turner. *Party and Constituency: Pressures on Congress*. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1951). p.10. (Attributed to *The Congressman*, p.427).

<sup>25</sup>ibid. p.211.





behavior, maintaining that scholars must also study the time spent in and the behavior of incumbents at home in their districts or states, as an indicator of how incumbents maximize the benefits incumbency offers. “Home style,” or the way in which a member behaves while at home, affects every aspect of the way an incumbent behaves on Capitol Hill (his DC style) and allows him to nurture his seat’s safety.<sup>26</sup> For instance, a member of the House of Representatives is given a large amount of safety and freedom with regard to policy decisions when he has cultivated a feeling of necessity at home. By favorably allocating resources throughout his district, alleviating the costs of government for his citizens, demonstrating his concern for his district through frequent personal visits, and explaining his Washington activity in a positive light, an incumbent is able to protect his seat and attain increased personal autonomy. Even a moderate stance on the Hill is connected to a member’s home style because he is appealing to the lowest common denominator and the broadest contingent of constituencies. For instance, studies have demonstrated that “the more competitive the district, the less likely are representatives to take extreme stands on matters of public policy.”<sup>27</sup> When a member behaves at home in a way that makes him indispensable, he is free to assume more extreme platforms. Home style has a direct influence on a member’s ability to pursue policy initiatives on Capitol Hill. This often-neglected area of research is the crucial piece in the puzzle of understanding congressional behavior.

Recent political scientists have studied home styles with as much intensity as they had previously offered Hill behavior. More importantly, they are studying how one affects the other. Robert Weber maintains that “the concept of home style, largely because of its constituency orientation, provides at most a partial guide to Washington behavior,” and he researches congressional behavior by combining “a Washington perspective with our view

---

<sup>26</sup> Morris P. Fiorina and David W. Rhode, eds. *Home Style and Washington Work: Studies of Congressional Politics*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Louis A. Froman Jr. *Congressmen and Their Constituencies*. (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1963). p.116.



from the district.”<sup>28</sup> Some scholars have broadened the home-style theory to demonstrate how cultivation and attention to home styles has freed members from constituent accountability in policy negotiations, making them almost completely independent actors of their own will. Glenn Parker describes “attentive” home style as the critical and unrecognized factor in the recent phenomena of increased incumbent independence and autonomy. He claims that “by cultivating the appearance of attentiveness and by convincing constituents that their interests are well cared for no matter what the legislator does in Washington, incumbents have gained a measure of freedom from scrutiny and interference on the part of constituents.”<sup>29</sup> However, even as home style allows for increased autonomy on questions of legislation, it also emphasizes the importance and continuing presence of constituent restraints on members who must convince their district that they are, indeed, attentive to their home base.

On the other side of the equation, other scholars have described how behavior on the Hill can actually serve as an important part of a member’s home style appearance. For instance, committee assignments are a long-studied component of congressional behavior that would seem to fall strictly under the category of Washington work. However, Weber describes a recently elected representative who, in a nod to the farmers living in his district, secured a seat on the Agriculture Committee. He pursued this committee assignment based not on his desire to draft “good legislation” but rather in an attempt to serve his constituency and secure his reelection. One legislative assistant to this representative, in a later interview, admitted “agriculture was absolutely the last Committee that he wanted to go on, but he felt obligated by the nature of his district to go on that Committee.”<sup>30</sup> Richard Fenno studied committee selection as an important indication of how district demands influence a member’s behavior on Capitol Hill. His research prompted him to believe that

---

<sup>28</sup>Fiorina and Rhode, eds. *Home Style and Washington Work*. p.81.

<sup>29</sup>Glenn R Parker. *Homeward Bound: Explaining Changes in Congressional Behavior*. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986). p.7.

<sup>30</sup>Fiorina and Rhode, eds. *Home Style and Washington Work*. p.82.



reelection is one of the goals congressmen hope to achieve through committee selection and they actively pursue particular committees based on this, and other, goals.<sup>31</sup> In fact, some members recognize the political handicap that assignment to a particular committee could be to their reelection goals. One member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs replied that “politically it’s not a good committee for me. My constituents are interested in bread and butter, and there’s no bread and butter on Foreign Affairs.”<sup>32</sup> Even when committee selection is focused on different member goals, such as influence, further political aspirations, or the desire to create sound policy, members themselves recognize and consider how committee selection on Capitol Hill could sway constituent opinion and thus their own political goals.

What brings DC style and home style together is an incumbent’s strongest protection against losing his seat and thus the most important benefit of incumbency: the appearance of *doing something*. This strategy is known to political scientists as credit claiming. When a member attends a roll call vote he has the benefit of being able to demonstrate that he is not merely in support of popular legislation but is instead responsible for its passage. When he signs up for a particular committee he is often working in defense of an important issue to his state, not simply speaking in its defense. Credit claiming is acting in a particular way while in DC “so as to generate a belief in a relevant political actor (or actors) that one is personally responsible for causing the government, or some unit thereof, to do something that the actor (or actors) considers desirable. The political logic of this, from the congressman’s point of view, is that an actor who believes that a member can make pleasing things happen will no doubt wish to keep him in office so that he can make pleasing things happen in the future.”<sup>33</sup> Every member must properly use his time in Washington so that he can tell his voters back home that he

---

<sup>31</sup>Fenno, Richard F., Jr. *Congressmen In Committees*. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1973). p.2.

<sup>32</sup>*ibid.* p.12.

<sup>33</sup>Mayhew. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. p.53.



accomplished what he promised; that he alleviated taxes, built new roads, supported schools, and defended his state's assets. An incumbent must use his position as such to create an aura of necessity around himself so that his reelection is a requirement and to not reelect him is paramount to disaster for the future of the state and its citizens. Members must utilize their time on Capitol Hill so that they have something to show to their constituents when they return home. This portrayal of action makes members indispensable and thus safe in their seat for as long as they remain essential.

The easiest way for a congressman to create this feeling of indispensability is by attention to constituent service. Much of this service is very basic, general, and simple. The website of nearly any member contains a link to a series of constituent services available through that member's office. These include obtaining a flag, letters of recommendation to Service Academies, tickets for tours while vacationing in Washington, information on the state, district, or congressional schedule, internships, and contact information. However, constituent service goes much deeper than this. Congressional staffs have been expanded to include individuals who are devoted solely to the needs of constituents. These staffers "aid state and local governments in their efforts to pick up funds" and "assist individual constituents who experience problems with subnational governments. Congress has not only become a national ombudsman but a 'federal' one as well. Indeed, it has become a consumer complaint agency."<sup>34</sup> Congressmen can aid their constituents in wading through the red tape of the government; they can assist a constituent with passport snags, federal improvements to a city's physical structure, the allocation of public works programs in their communities, and even local military employment.<sup>35</sup> The ability to assist their constituents in these governmental annoyances further enhances a member's ability to credit claim because the service is spun to appear as though no other member could do the same. The compulsion to serve constituents is so intense that

---

<sup>34</sup> Johannes. *To Serve the People*. p.225.

<sup>35</sup> Arnold. *Congress and the Bureaucracy*. Chapters 6,7, and 8.





members have been known to create situations (even problems) that further necessitate their existence.

In 1976 an unknown governor from the state of Georgia ran for President. He developed a campaign strategy around the idea that he was not part of the Washington political machine. Jimmy Carter won his bid for the presidency and suddenly presidents were products of state governments, not descendants of the typical stepping-stone of the Senate.<sup>36</sup> Several successors to President Carter have attempted to portray themselves as outsiders, detached from the red tape and bureaucracy of DC insider politics. Despite this, however, the bureaucracy survived Jimmy Carter's trend-setting campaign, nestled in a blanket of protection provided by the members of the United States Congress, according to Morris Fiorina in *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment*. In fact, Fiorina suggests that the "expansion of government is the result of a friendly conspiracy between congressmen and bureaucrats to 'drum up' business."<sup>37</sup> This is an important example of congressional behavior cloaked under the appearance of pure constituent service and yet suited to members' proximate goal of reelection.

In *Keystone*, Fiorina contends that members increase their chances of reelection through the development and the protection of the governmental bureaucracy. One may wonder why Congress would develop and sustain the establishment when voters regard it with such annoyance. However, as the bureaucracy serves to increase a member's likelihood of reelection, it is therefore in the best interests of all members to ensure that it does not disappear. The way in which the bureaucracy increases reelection goes back to economic theories of the Great Depression. Desperate for a way out of the Depression, economists and politicians developed a theory of deficit spending. This allowed the government, especially the Congress, to borrow money in order to get things done.

---

<sup>36</sup>Since Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan was governor of California before becoming President (1980-1988), Bill Clinton was governor of Arkansas (1992-2000), and George W. Bush was governor of Texas (elected in 2000).

<sup>37</sup>Johannes. *To Serve the People*. p.36.



According to Fiorina, deficit spending allowed members to get work accomplished without spending unavailable money. In a similar vein, the creation of a bureaucracy allows members to give their constituents special benefits without raising taxes. By hiring on a large staff, a member of Congress is able to answer more mail, send out more fliers, and initiate contact with more citizens of his district than ever before.<sup>38</sup> Voters often remember a kindness when it is given, especially without the strings of taxes, and reelection chances are increased. Furthermore, when constituents complain about the bureaucracy, or rather the red-tape that surrounds bureaucratic departments such as that of Motor Vehicles, to name one example, members are able to use their connections to “rush” deliver contracts, permits, and other bureaucratically handled benefits to their constituents. Members therefore, create the feeling that without them, citizens would have to suffer through longer lines, unending waiting lists, and inevitable inaction. The lack of faith in the bureaucracy, and the willingness of the public to destroy it, is its largest benefit for the members of Congress because they publicly appear to be working against it. For “single-minded seekers of reelection” the development of a large bureaucracy is a brilliant tactical move that is beneficial to members of Congress across party and state boundaries.<sup>39</sup> However, what is perhaps more important than Fiorina’s central thesis regarding the safety of the bureaucracy is the underlying truth that members need to do *something*. They have to prove to their voting public that their reelection is necessary for the continuation of public contentment.

A study of congressional behavior may seem unimportant in light of the realization that behavior is often dictated by the norms and rules of the institution. This becomes especially important in a comparison of the House and the Senate because each have different institutional procedures. It must be acknowledged, however, that rules and norms serve, like any other aspect of congressional behavior, to advance a member’s realization

---

<sup>38</sup> Fiorina. *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment*. p.55.

<sup>39</sup> Arnold. *Congress and the Bureaucracy*. p.5.



of his goals. “The norms, informal arrangements, and rules that structure behavior within the institution will be altered if the behavior they dictate hampers, rather than facilitates, the advancement of senators’ goals.”<sup>40</sup> This statement is true in the House as well, making control of the Rules Committee, which dictates which rules actually “facilitate” the achievement of goals, critical. Near-complete obedience to the established internal rules and norms of behavior is in reality a rational choice made by members to work within the system. Cohesion among all members of Congress with regards to the rules, be they Senators or Representatives, allows each member to reap the benefits of congressional service. Without a system of norms guiding the internal behavior of Congress, very little would get done. If nothing gets done, no one has the ability to claim credit for a successful legislative record. Therefore, norms allow a collection of diversified individuals to work cogently within the system of congressional politics.

There are intrinsic differences between serving in the House of Representatives and the Senate. These differences include institutional norms, rules, and leadership formats and create different methods of behavior. The House, for instance, operates through a process of retail politics, in which every decision is made on the assumption that all politics are local. Representatives are forced to serve a very particular region and must customize their platforms to the needs of that area. House members run the risk of appearing too wholesale, too concerned with national or even state-centered politics, while forgetting the needs of the small and seemingly unimportant district.<sup>41</sup> Senators, however, must use a type of focused wholesale politics because their reelection goals are tied to the idea that their service is necessary for the benefit of the entire state. Senators cannot maintain special relationships with particular districts, lest they be seen as abandoning the rest of the state. For instance, senators in New York must avoid the seduction of New York City’s wealth and power. Upstate New York represents a large voting block throughout the state

---

<sup>40</sup>Sinclair. *The Transformation of the US Senate*. p.207.

<sup>41</sup>Matthews. *Hardball*. pp.52-53.



and has needs very different and even opposed to the needs of the city. The same is true in Illinois with regards to Chicago, Michigan and Detroit, and, of course, Louisiana and New Orleans. However, wholesale and retail politics are simply different styles, used to achieve the same goal. Though there is certainly more dividing the two institutions than just stylistic preferences, the dichotomy of retail and wholesale politics serves to illustrate that service in either branch, like service in any state, simply changes the methods, not the goals or expectations, of a member.

An enormous amount of attention from the contemporary media is spent on partisanship and so-called partisan bickering. Party loyalties and the divisions the parties create, however, were deliberately saved till the end of this thesis. This was not done to indicate the unimportance of party control but rather to illustrate and reiterate the idea that “there is nothing partisan about the right way to get things done politically.”<sup>42</sup> As institutions the parties advance members’ reelection goals by creating a support system that protects the marginal incumbent from outside attack. Furthermore, parties are essential to an incumbent’s ability to claim credit by creating the necessary endorsements for legislation. “It is an important fact of American politics that a congressman dispatched to Washington to guard the interests of a district cannot do the guarding by himself... It is only natural, therefore, that there should develop among congressmen habitual channels of mutual accommodation... Nor is it surprising that mutual accommodation, or log-rolling, should be most common among members of the same political party.”<sup>43</sup> When legislation is proposed that does not directly affect a member’s political interests, but is important to the interests of his fellow party member, voting along party lines reestablishes the support system needed to achieve congressional success. This give and take relationship among party members diminishes somewhat over time, as safe incumbents are granted more

---

<sup>42</sup>ibid. p.18.

<sup>43</sup>David Mayhew. *Party Loyalty Among Congressmen: The Difference Between Democrats and Republicans, 1947-1962*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966). pp.146-147.





maneuvering room and do not have to toe the party line, but remains a consistent factor in forging passable legislation. Moreover, the recent emphasis on bipartisanship allows incumbents the freedom to forge mutually beneficial alliances with non-party members that mirror those first developed by party politics. Senior incumbents who develop a coalition-building reputation have, to some extent, both worked within and overcome the boundaries of party loyalties to further increase their reelection capabilities.

Congressman X is a singular individual, created through a compilation of scholarly research. There is certainly more congressional literature that could have been used in this thesis, but an honest attempt was made to utilize some of the best-known and most applicable scholarly works. However, creating “X” on paper is an easier task than determining whether he truly exists. Researching one member, and applying these theories to this member, has expanded the reliability of these theories by removing them from the world of scholarly predictions into one of applied congressional politics. Applying these theories to several members of a state’s delegation is useful because it enables theory to be applied on a broader basis than is allowed by individual members. Individual members who have been used in previous case studies run the danger of being hand-chosen by researchers who have a particular goal in mind. Louisiana, however, was chosen for the exact opposite reason. Of all the states, Louisiana is seemingly the least likely state to embody political and theoretical norms. If Louisiana politics are truly a unique entity among the states, then the presence of “X-like” tactics among the Louisiana delegation would go far in proving scholarly theories. In short, if Congressman X serves in Louisiana, he can serve anywhere and must serve everywhere. This is perhaps overstating Louisiana’s uniqueness, but is simply mentioned to indicate that Louisiana was carefully chosen for this thesis in an attempt to remove all factors forcing conformity other than those presented in the scholarly literature.



### **Congressman X in Louisiana**



In the minds of American citizens, the United States Congress often becomes an entity of its own. After establishing how intentionally united members are in their goals and the methods used to achieve them, it is difficult to remember that factors for division remain. Most importantly, constituent demands differ according to the particulars of different regions and a congressman is required to “understand, worry about, and protect the interests of his district, state, and region.”<sup>44</sup> The citizens of the state of New York have far different needs and wants than those of California or Illinois. For the sake of his state, and more critically, the sake of his job security, members of Congress must learn to work together while at the same time working apart. Congressional members cannot work independently, for they will find it impossible to push forward any important piece of legislation, any proof that they spent their time in Congress achieving *something*. Legislative governing is about “tradeoffs,” and making “distinctions between what they would like to get and what they have to get. Participants in the legislative process typically have to settle for less than they might want. It is very important to know when to declare victory and when to take something for now and return for more later.”<sup>45</sup> Learning how to govern means understanding the need to work together to achieve similar goals and creating a situation in which members align themselves to each other, developing their behaviors in complimentary manners. However, a congressman must also continually fight for the diversified needs of his own state’s constituents. It is thus crucial to understand applied congressional politics from the viewpoint of an individual state, where the requirements of passable legislation and institutional cohesion are, on a daily basis, pitted against the desires of a specific constituency.

The average congressman has been created on paper, but can he really exist in this world of divided loyalties? The most concrete way to determine his existence is to put it to

---

<sup>44</sup>Polsby, ed. *Congressional Behavior*. p.137.

<sup>45</sup>Richard F. Fenno, Jr. *Learning to Govern: An Institutional View of the 104th Congress*. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 1997). p.21.



the test and investigate the congressmen themselves. An in depth and accurate portrayal of Congress can therefore be done through the lens of any, or all, of the fifty states. Perhaps some of the themes would reoccur in each and every state of the Union, others in some, and still others would not appear anywhere else but rather are the exclusive property of a particular state. This is where Louisiana becomes important. Louisiana will serve as the lens through which this thesis will investigate applied congressional politics on the Hill. Before the scholarly theories can be applied to the Louisiana delegation, the question remains: Why Louisiana? Long known for unique, oftentimes bizarre, and always colorful politics, Louisiana is a perfect state to use as a case study for this project. Louisiana works well in this experiment because, in addition to its notoriously peculiar nature, the state is of average size, its congressional members run the political spectrum, from Republican to Democrat, Junior to Senior, and powerful players to insignificant members, making Louisiana an otherwise “typical” state. However, Louisiana, like any other state, has a particular set of needs and goals. Louisiana politics, specifically, makes for an interesting topic because the state is currently at a critical period of change. While the state politicians in Louisiana have been able to move the state out of its notoriously low rankings in nearly all national surveys, its delegates to the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate are currently and rapidly increasing in power and prestige, and doing their best to bring Louisiana away from its appallingly poor reputation.

If the goal of this thesis is to study the nature of congressional behavior through the specifics of an individual state, then those specifics are crucial to the argument of the project. There are several peculiarities to Louisiana that must, therefore, be understood. Getting elected in Louisiana is much different than getting elected anywhere else. A candidate must have an acute understanding of his region’s particular demographics, so that he can hypothesize as to the tides of public opinion. This understanding is crucial both at election time and while a member serves in Congress, as he must act at both times in accordance with his constituent’s demands. For example, though committee appointments





are important to national regard and political power, they are even more important as a factor of constituent service. Voters from Louisiana want to see that their elected members are serving on committees that deal directly with their very personal concerns. Understanding a political district, its needs and desires and expectations and intentions, is the critical element to explaining congressional behavior. This truism, however, if it can accurately be called a truism, further proves the thesis that though specific needs and congressional action may differ based on constituencies, the typical ways of achieving goals and the goals themselves remain the same from state to state.

Louisiana, from a purely numerical perspective, appears to be an overwhelmingly typical state. According to data accumulated by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000, Louisiana's population is at 4,468,976.<sup>46</sup> In comparison, Louisiana's neighboring population, in Alabama, was recorded at 4,447,100 and Virginia, useful to establish a frame of reference, is 7,078,515.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, Louisiana's relative size is average among the states and significantly smaller than some of the larger voting blocks. Furthermore, Louisiana's female population, rates of household ownership, and general revenue per capita are all fairly consistent with overall U.S. percentage rates.<sup>48</sup> According to these and other numbers, therefore, Louisiana is only moderately different from the United States as a whole in certain statistical areas. This information is important because it provides a collection of controls to stabilize this experiment. An experiment such as this done using California or Texas would have to focus equal attention on both the nature of the state's politics as well as the challenges of representing a state that is geographically and

---

<sup>46</sup>State and County Quick Facts, 2000. US Census Bureau. [www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html). 5 March 2000.

<sup>47</sup>Every state's population information can be located easily through the State and County Quick Facts. US Census Bureau. [www.quickfacts.census.gov](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov). 5 March 2000.

<sup>48</sup>Female population of Louisiana: 51.6%, female population of the US: 50.9%; Home ownership rate in Louisiana: 67.9%, home ownership rate of the US: 66.2%; Louisiana's general revenue per capita (1990): \$2,114, US's general revenue per capita (1990): 2,080. State and County Quick Facts, 2000. US Census Bureau. [www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html). 5 March 2000. and State Profile of Louisiana. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999. [www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt](http://www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt). 5 March 2000.



demographically larger and more complex than most. If Louisiana is fairly average statistically then the only variables that need be applied to the question of Louisiana's individuality as an American political entity refer to the nature of the citizenry and the state's politics.

By all accounts, Louisiana is a state on the move whose political makeup is critical to the direction that move will take. Louisiana is undoubtedly one of America's most troubled states. There are two common sayings in Louisiana that illustrate this point colloquially: "At least we are not Mississippi" and "Louisiana is first in everything it wants to be last in and last in all it would prefer to be first in." Though these two statements may overestimate the challenges a Louisiana politician must tackle, they are consistently proven accurate assessments of the state's national rankings. The United States Census' most recent rankings find that Louisiana has the fourth highest rate of violent crime, third highest births to teenage mothers, second highest percentage of the population living below the poverty line, and the fourth highest number of federal and state prisoners per 100,000 population. On the other side of these rankings, Louisiana ranks forty-ninth among the states for the percentage of the civilian population that is employed and forty-fourth for median household incomes.<sup>49</sup> These numbers serve to illuminate the state's position and the urgent need for strong congressional leadership as a means of rectifying the state's numerous problems.

Despite these enormous problems, it remains true that Louisiana is a state on the brink of success. Enrollment rates in public elementary and secondary schools are at 89.3 percent, just below the national average of 91.3 percent. Even more optimistic are the numbers regarding collegiate enrollment. An impressive 71.1 percent of Louisiana residents attend full time college programs. This number dwarfs the national average of

---

<sup>49</sup>State Profile of Louisiana. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999. [www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt](http://www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt). 5 March 2002.



57.4 percent, making Louisiana the fifth highest enrollment state.<sup>50</sup> Education is an indication of the future and Louisiana's results in this area are incredibly positive. Furthermore, the Louisiana political scene specifically has seen a number of recent increases in power. Louisiana's governor is among the nation's most popular and its congressional delegation has assumed positions of leadership and power that, though they will be discussed in greater depth later, have moved the state into the position necessary to enact significant reform. The combined problems of Louisiana and recent successes that point to a positive future create an open field for congressional politics. Louisiana is a state with a lot to be done, a lot of potential, and a lot of room for success that can enable savvy incumbents to claim an enormous amount of credit.

This thesis must move to the issue of Louisiana's uniqueness to answer the question: is Louisiana truly congressionally unique? That question will have a two-fold answer. The first answer, which will follow immediately, will address the state's own political identity to discover whether the nature of Louisiana politics in some way requires that its congressional members behave in a different manner than those of other states. The second half of the answer will address the members themselves to determine, not whether they need to behave differently, but rather whether they do in fact behave in a manner separate and apart from other members. It is important, therefore, to remember that these are two separate entities and must be researched as such.

The first aspect of Louisiana's alleged uniqueness that must be explained is a phenomenon known as southern exceptionalism. Of course, the South is a notorious group of states, known for both good and bad and always associated, either for well or ill, with the periods immediately before, during, and after the Civil War. However, the idea that the South is somehow separate and independent from the Union remains (if only in the hearts of some diehard Southerners themselves) and that distinction has been applied to politics.

---

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*



A well-respected political scientist, V.O. Key, applied the South's exceptional nature to the area of congressional behavior and his thesis must be explored to determine whether a congressional delegate from a southern state is forced to behave in a manner different from the Congressman X that has been created by national scholars. Therefore, the idea of southern exceptionalism begins with the man whose work was originally applicable to this thesis. However, in the way of disproving the idea that members are forced to behave differently based on the region they serve, it must be acknowledged that Key's book was written in 1949 during an era when congressional behavior had not fully developed to the position it is at now. For instance, the first section of Key's book is entitled "Political Leadership: The One Party System in the States," and goes on to describe the Democratic Party's domination in the Solid South.<sup>51</sup> Today's South is not dominated by the Democratic Party in the same way and has in fact recently witnessed an increase of Republican representation. This paper does not attempt to argue that Congressman X's behavior is timeless but rather simply that it disregards state and district boundaries.

Key's book, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, is a long-studied and well-respected look at Southern politics and must be examined here with the acknowledgment that if members behave differently in the South, they do in fact behave differently in Louisiana. Therefore, his theories must be applied to this thesis in order to determine the fluctuations in congressional behavior based on regional identity. Even as Key describes a South that is drastically different from the rest of the nation, and a system of politics that has a different nature than the non-southern states, he maintains certain national generalities that are also included in today's scholarship on congressional behavior. Key admits that even as the Democratic Party dominates Southern politics, part of that domination stems from the fact that incumbents maintain a certain level of indispensability that perpetuates the Solid South. "The re-election of individual Senators

---

<sup>51</sup>V.O. Key. *Southern Politics: In State and Nation*. (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc., 1949). Section I.





and Representatives over long periods wins a special advantage for the South through the workings of the seniority principle. Southern voters have a keen awareness of the benefit accruing from long congressional service and the challenger of an elder statesman cannot easily persuade the electorate that young blood is preferable to seniority on committees and in congressional leadership.”<sup>52</sup> In describing the unity of southern senators, he acknowledges that this unity has as much to do with the issue of constituent concerns as it does any unnatural “southern” force: “The hypothesis underlying the selection [of examples demonstrating southern unity at Senate roll call votes] for analysis is that such roll calls must be on issues on which some compelling interest peculiar to the South drives southern Senators toward unanimity.”<sup>53</sup> This is not to say that some issue, such as agriculture, could not similarly unite a coalition of midwestern delegations. Instead, Key explains southern constituencies as more homogeneous in needs and wants than other regions. The fact that the South, as a region, may bond over needs different than the rest of the nation does not deny the basic thesis of this paper. Instead, it reiterates it by demonstrating that while different areas (either states or entire regions) may have different needs, the behavior of delegates and their drive to fulfill those needs does not dramatically change or diminish. Key’s hypothesis merely defends the idea that while some congressmen may feel safe to pursue national issues, the ultimate obligation of the average congressman remains tied to the needs of the specific area he represents.

Key’s discussion of Louisiana is important because he discusses, to some degree, the peculiar nature of Louisiana, a nature that separates it from its southern neighbors. As this paper attempts to determine whether that nature distinguishes Louisiana’s congressmen from other congressional delegations, it is important to establish how unique Louisiana is in reality? Perhaps Louisiana’s alleged uniqueness comes from its notoriousness. Key claims, “Few would contest the proposition that among its

---

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* p.345.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p.350.



professional politicians of the past two decades Louisiana has had more men who have been in jail, or who should have been, than any other American state.”<sup>54</sup> This statement was made in 1946 in response to the near dictatorship of Huey P. Long; since then, Louisiana has seen one governor (himself a former member of the United States House of Representatives) elected to an unprecedented four, nonconsecutive terms, despite federal racketeering and fraud charges. He was acquitted of these charges and reelected, only to face yet another series of fraud and racketeering charges. Edwards was finally convicted on all accounts.<sup>55</sup> To the voters of Louisiana’s credit, Edwin Edwards’ only opponent in his last bid for re-election was David Duke, the former Grand Dragon of the Klu Klux Klan. Despite this, however, Louisiana is surely not the only state in the Union with stories of political corruption. Furthermore, the presence of corruption does not negate the theory that congressmen from Louisiana, like all others, behave in typical ways, as understood by political scientists.

There may be characteristics beyond a propensity for corruption that individualize Louisiana as a state. Perhaps the electorate body in Louisiana is so unique that it maintains different requirements for its congressional delegation. Certainly Louisianans have a bizarre opinion towards what they call the “state’s favorite spectator sport.” “Politics plays the role in Louisiana that TV wrestling does in the rest of the nation. It is fixed. It is flamboyant. It is surreal... Louisiana politics is of an intensity and complexity that are matched.... only in the republic of Lebanon”<sup>56</sup> There are few states, at least before the election of Jesse Ventura, that find a comparison between politics and professional wrestling appropriate. There are even fewer who would boast of this comparison as if election fraud was an enjoyable and necessary aspect of active democracy. However, Louisiana’s acceptance, and even promotion, of big money, political humor, and rhetoric

---

<sup>54</sup>ibid. p.156.

<sup>55</sup>Michael L. Kurtz, ed. *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History*. Volume IX. (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1998). p.38.

<sup>56</sup>ibid. p.7.



during an election campaign does not go very far to indicate that the Louisiana electorate does not expect those features to pay off when the member serves in Congress. In fact, calling politics a spectator sport is not much different than Chris Matthews labeling congressional politics a “game” or “contest.”<sup>57</sup> Louisianans expect the same level of attention, dedication, and leadership from their delegation as any other state. Louisiana voters are concerned about typical issues such as “roads, education, social welfare, labor, taxes, the proper use of natural resources, and the relative power and authority of the Governor, the Legislature, and local government officials.”<sup>58</sup> Even the infamous Senator Huey P. Long was required to create a feeling of intimacy with his constituents. Long’s power and control in Louisiana stemmed largely from his ability to create himself as whomever the voters needed him to be at the moment. “He spoke the language of the country people when in the country districts and the language of the city dwellers when in the cities and towns.”<sup>59</sup> There is little difference between Long’s recreation of himself as a man of Louisiana during his bid for the United States Senate and Newt Gingrich’s successful campaign to tie the Republican Party platform to the American people, making Republicans appear to be the party more responsive to constituent needs.<sup>60</sup>

It would appear, therefore, that Louisiana voters may be unique in their particular expectations of politics but not regarding the way a member is required to behave. For example, Louisiana may be more accepting of big money campaigns than the average individual from another state, but that acceptance still demands that the member, once elected, manipulate his time both at home and in DC to appear dedicated to the needs of his district. Now that it is understood that the nature of Louisiana voters does not require a different type of behavior from its congressional members, this thesis must turn to

---

<sup>57</sup> Matthews. *Hardball*. Repeated several times in the Introduction.

<sup>58</sup> Edwin Adams Davis. *Louisiana: The Pelican State*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959). p.285.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* p.287.

<sup>60</sup> Fenno. *Learning to Govern*.



determining whether those members, required or not, do in fact behave in a way different from other members. Thoroughly investigating the behavior of four members of the Louisiana delegation and applying their behavior to the scholarly theories laid out in the introduction will address this topic. Each member that will be studied was carefully chosen for specific reasons and each represents different aspects of the state's political makeup. Two senators and two members of the House were chosen in order to equally juxtapose the needs of bicameral legislation. Senator Breaux is Louisiana's most senior member, as well as the member with the highest position of leadership. He is also the only member of this study whose home base is far removed from the city of New Orleans. Senator Landrieu is Louisiana's junior senator, only female, and likely its most marginal candidate. Congressman Vitter represents a suburban district outside of New Orleans that is predominately white, wealthy, and conservative. He is the only Republican chosen for this study. Congressman Jefferson is the representative for the district that includes the City of New Orleans and all of its varying needs. He is also a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and Louisiana's only racial minority member. Ideally, the differences surrounding each of the members chosen will further illuminate the argument that while every congressman may be required to address varying needs, the reasons and methods by which they address those needs are mainly uniform, without regard to regional identities.





**Senator John B. Breaux**  
**(D-LA)**



Senator John B. Breaux (D-LA) is arguably the most influential and powerful member of Louisiana's congressional delegation. Senator Breaux's influence is the result of a political career that has spanned over thirty years. The career he has created is the near embodiment of Congressman X's main characteristics. He has learned, over the years, to behave in a way best suited to increasing his reelection potential and the visible results were seen in his 1998 reelection campaign. An in-depth investigation of Senator Breaux's initial rise to prominence and his continued ability to create an aura of indispensability demonstrates that serving in a state that popularizes atypical and even unethical politicians does not exempt congressmen from certain behavioral characteristics.

At the young age of 28, Senator Breaux was elected to the United States House of Representatives to represent the seventh district in western Louisiana. Breaux is a native of Crowley, Louisiana, a town in the seventh district. His roots and foundation were therefore well established in the seventh district when he ran for the House. After fourteen years of service in the House, Senator Breaux decided to run for the newly opened seat in the Senate, filling the vacancy left by Russell Long (D-LA), of the infamous Louisiana Long family.<sup>61</sup> The largest challenge to Breaux's election bid illuminates the differences between serving in the House and serving in the Senate. As previously mentioned, Breaux's intimate constituency remained in the seventh district, far removed from the influential, and much different, voting block of southeastern Louisiana, specifically within the city of New Orleans. Breaux was able to successfully broaden the retail politics he had learned in the House into a wholesale version of campaigning through Senator Breaux appeared concerned with the needs of the entire state, uncompelled to support one area's needs over another's. He did this by aligning himself with a prominent political group that was present throughout the state: the African-American voting population. The Democratic Party won ninety percent of the black vote that year and Breaux's ability to

---

<sup>61</sup> Senator John Breaux--Biography. [www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html). 8 February 2000.



convey his loyalty to the party enabled him to capitalize on this voting trend.<sup>62</sup> Breaux built a coalition of voters that included both his home base of loyalists and African-Americans who accounted for 60.1 percent of the population of New Orleans alone.<sup>63</sup> This newly created voting base allowed him to become a statewide candidate. His early ability to forge a coalition of voters would become Senator Breaux's calling card, as he built a reputation of creating compromises and facilitating the passage of bipartisan legislation. He was thus successfully able to carry his campaigning style onto Capitol Hill and play the role of a perpetual campaigner.

Once he was elected, and indeed since he has been reelected two times, Senator Breaux has perpetuated the safety of his seat in two distinct ways. He has exploited the safety of incumbency by shaping his legislative successes around the needs of his constituents. He has also exercised the independence safety has brought him and become a national legislator and powerful political player. At the same time that he has claimed responsibility for the passage of legislation that is important to Louisiana, Senator Breaux has maintained important committee and leadership positions that have little to do with the particulars of his state and instead establish him as a leader in the Senate. As Breaux's seat has become safer, he has acquired the freedom to pursue goals not related to reelection. However, reelection never falls far from an incumbent's mind, and Breaux has been forced to balance his reelection plans with his other goals. He has done this in a two-fold manner. First, Senator Breaux has not forgotten his original base of voter support and has sought to use his time on Capitol Hill to further expand that base. Second, even as he has pursued issues that would seem national in their nature, and thus unattached to the everyday lives of Louisiana citizens, Senator Breaux has demonstrated how leadership in the Senate and the promotion of himself as a national and powerful member can be beneficial for the

---

<sup>62</sup>Edward Walsh. "Four new Southern Senators Owe Victories to Black Vote: Allegiance to Democrats as High as 90%." *The Washington Post*. 7 November 1986. Lexis Nexis.

<sup>63</sup>Census of Population and Housing, District 2 of Louisiana, 1990. US Census Bureau. [www.census.gov/datamapcd/22/02prof.txt](http://www.census.gov/datamapcd/22/02prof.txt). 5 March 2002.



whole state, making national issues important to Louisiana. The following chapter will attempt to explain how Breaux has balanced his two-fold approach into a workable political strategy, using tactics already established by political theorists.

If ambition is the necessary component of successful election bids, John Breaux's service has demonstrated he has it in spades. It requires an enormous amount of ambition for him willingly and continually to submit himself to the scrutiny of public elections and Senator Breaux has done so ten times. However, Senator Breaux's career, and willingness to undergo the ordeal of perpetual campaigning, is also a statement of the benefits of incumbency. The recent Republican takeover proved that no seat, even Ted Kennedy's, was completely safe from competent challengers but Senator Breaux has utilized his time in both Washington and Louisiana to ensure that his seat remains safely guarded from worthy opposition. In 1998, Senator Breaux defeated his Republican challenger, winning 64.0 percent of the votes. Jim Donelon, Breaux's closest competitor, won a mere 31.64 percent of the state's votes.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Senator Breaux received an endorsement from every major newspaper in the state of Louisiana.<sup>65</sup> This ability to combine popular support and critical acclaim has allowed Senator Breaux to safely establish himself as Louisiana's unopposed senior senator.

The first key to creating political indispensability is drafting and supporting legislation that addresses the critical issues facing a member's constituency. Senator Breaux has sponsored or co-sponsored legislation that attempts to answer the needs of Louisiana's numerous and varied concerns. For instance, Senator Breaux's access enabled him to host a luncheon with Indonesian Ambassador Soemadi Brotodiningrat where he discussed rice imports with the Ambassador. Indonesia is the world's largest rice importer and, according to U.S. food aid laws, Indonesia is entitled to import over 56,000 metric

---

<sup>64</sup> Federal Election Results, 1998. Official Election Results by State-- US Senate. Federal Election Commission. [www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe98/98senate.htm#LA](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe98/98senate.htm#LA). 20 March 2002.

<sup>65</sup> Senator John Breaux--Biography. [www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html). 8 February 2000.





tons of rice per year.<sup>66</sup> Louisiana produces a large percentage of the nation's rice supply, ranking third as the nation's largest rice supplier, and this legislation would enable producers and millers to sell their surplus rice to Indonesia.<sup>67</sup> The expansion of Indonesia as a U.S. rice importer could thus be very important to the state's economy but the legislation that provided Indonesia with the ability to import rice as part of an aid package did not specify where the rice would be produced. Senator Breaux's involvement indicates to a constituent, especially one who has some interest in the sale of rice, that he made it his personal responsibility to ensure that Louisiana benefited from this generic rice package.

According to cost-benefit analysis and rational choice theory, individuals are most willing to act when the cost of inaction is great. Potential benefits are not always enough to convince individuals to organize, but the elimination of potential costs often attracts greater attention. Congressmen, therefore, often do more to gain political support when they are responsible for the defeat of costly legislation than when claiming credit for another bill's passage. This is true of Senator Breaux's role in the defeat of the Btu tax. According to President Clinton's 1993 budget proposals, the British thermal unit tax was to be levied on the use of fuel based on its energy content. This tax, if passed, would have severely injured maritime trade industries at New Orleans' busy port and, most importantly, the petrochemical industry based in Louisiana's Gulf Coast.<sup>68</sup> This tax was replaced by a compromise introduced by Senator Breaux that, demonstrating surprising understanding of congressional behavior, suited the best interests of both the tax's opponents and the overall budget's supporters. Senator Breaux's proposal that the bill be replaced with a 7.3 percent tax on transportation fuels alone eliminated much of the damage done to petroleum industries throughout Louisiana and much of the United

---

<sup>66</sup> "Breaux Urges Indonesian Ambassador to Buy Louisiana Rice." Senator John Breaux. [www.senate.gov/~breaux/releases/2002321B38.html](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux/releases/2002321B38.html). 21 March 2002.

<sup>67</sup> Leading Agricultural Commodities and US Ranking of Cash Receipts, 1995. LEAP. [www.leap.nlu.edu/STAAB/Chap11/TAB1113.txt](http://www.leap.nlu.edu/STAAB/Chap11/TAB1113.txt). 21 March 2002.

<sup>68</sup> "Btu Tax-- A Better Way." *The Times Picayune*. 22 May 1993. Lexis Nexis.



States.<sup>69</sup> This compromise, and the eventual passage of Clinton's proposal, won Breaux enormous support in Louisiana. One constituent, in a letter written to Louisiana's largest newspaper, *The Times Picayune*, best exemplifies how legislative service in DC can enhance an incumbent's ability to increase his base of support at home: "Anyone who says that Congress doesn't heed the voice of the people should study Sen. John Breaux and the skillful way he brought about the defeat of the Btu tax proposal. Sen. Breaux not only heeded his constituents' wishes, but he also played the leading role in defeating the tax and insisted on deeper spending cuts. For that, he deserves recognition and our thanks. It wasn't easy for Sen. Breaux to say no to his friend, Bill Clinton, but when forced to choose between his friendship to the president and his responsibility to his constituents, Breaux put Louisiana first."<sup>70</sup> The ability to make his constituents believe that every facet of his behavior in Washington is focused around the needs of Louisiana first and foremost, especially when that need is the elimination of costly legislation, is perhaps Congressman X's, and Senator Breaux's, most important attribute.

The exportation of rice and the taxation of energy are only two of the areas of concern among Louisiana's citizens and a savvy congressman must ensure that he attempt to cover, at least minimally, as many constituent-based issues as possible. Though the Senate does allow some members to focus attention on particular areas of expertise, especially through the committee system, no one member is allowed, by his constituents, to dedicate the entirety of his time to that individual issue. Senator Breaux's voting and legislative record thus spans a broad range of issues. He has tackled questions concerning wetland conservation, sugar cane production, law enforcement and public safety, the maritime industry, education, and small businesses. On the national level, Senator Breaux has addressed the problems facing media violence, safer skies, interstate commerce, tax

---

<sup>69</sup> John McQuaid. "La Energy Interests Lobby Against Dead Btu Tax." *The Times Picayune*. June 11, 1993. Lexis Nexis.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas B. Coleman. "Praises Breaux." *The Times Picayune*. July 15, 1993. Lexis Nexis.



reform, balanced budgets, and economic stimulus packages. The only common denominator unifying this assorted list of policy initiatives is a connection to Louisiana. Whether they were national or state-specific in their nature, Senator Breaux has portrayed each piece of legislature as a benefit to the state in some manner. Some of his involvement has come through roll call votes, the attachment of “Breaux” amendments, or the drafting of original legislation, but Senator Breaux has worked to ensure that each of these issues in some way has his name stamped onto them so that he can claim full and complete credit for the benefits they produce.

Senator Breaux is necessarily concerned with maintaining his original campaign appearance of responsiveness to the needs of the entire state. The first page of his website contains a map of Louisiana. Clicking on any area of that map will lead the concerned constituent to a litany of accomplishments Senator Breaux has achieved for that area alone.<sup>71</sup> However, simply stating his accomplishments is not enough. In order to maintain a safe seat, a member must create the feeling among his constituents that he is indispensable. He must convey the work he has done and the idea that no one else could have accomplished the same to his voters. Scholarly theory suggests that one way a member can do this is through the committees on which he serves. Senator Breaux has recognized the validity of committee service as a means of appearing vital to Louisiana’s political progress. He currently serves on committees that are critical to the needs of his constituents, thereby making it appear as though he has a direct say in a majority of the legislation that actually touches their lives.

Senator Breaux serves on the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. Itself an important and powerful committee, the Commerce Committee is divided into ten subcommittees, including one on Oceans and Fisheries. Senator Breaux serves on this subcommittee, responding to the enormous economic importance of

---

<sup>71</sup>Senator John Breaux. [www.senate.gov/~breaux](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux). 8 February 2002.



Louisiana's Gulf Coast. According to census data, 41,805 citizens of Louisiana over the age of sixteen claim that they work in the industries of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.<sup>72</sup> It is important to recognize that the fishing industry in Louisiana is equally important to Southeastern Louisiana, where Senator Breaux has a weaker base, and Southwestern Louisiana where Breaux's primary base of support resides. Service on this subcommittee helps to convince citizens of Louisiana's lower Delta and Gulf areas that Senator Breaux is concerned with their needs.

The Oceans and Fisheries subcommittee handles legislation that is critical to the concerns of Southern Louisiana. One of the most important pieces of legislation this subcommittee passes is the establishment of individual fishing quotas. These quotas dictate to both commercial and sport fishermen how much and what type of fish can be kept and what must be returned to the water, based on an assessment of environmental and population concerns.<sup>73</sup> An individual whose livelihood is based on the number of fish he brings to shore each day, such as the shrimpers, crabbers, and oyster dredgers that work in the Gulf of Mexico, is especially cognizant of these and reliant on his congressman to establish quotas that favorably enable him to earn a profit. This is a natural, rational expectation of human beings and translates into votes. Senator Breaux's service on the Oceans and Fisheries Subcommittee thus has the welcome benefit of credit claiming for recent reconsiderations of low quota levels, thereby further protecting his seat.

Senator Breaux serves on another subcommittee that is important to the needs of his constituents. In 1998 over 12.7 percent of Louisiana's population was over the age of 65, making the senior citizen population of Louisiana the thirty-eighth highest in the United States.<sup>74</sup> Among them, 383,329 claim some of their income from Social Security and

---

<sup>72</sup> Labor Force Status and Employment Characteristics: 1990. US Census Bureau. [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsTable?\\_lang=en&\\_vt\\_name=DEC\\_1990\\_STF3\\_DP3&\\_geo\\_id=04000US22](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsTable?_lang=en&_vt_name=DEC_1990_STF3_DP3&_geo_id=04000US22). 5 March 2002.

<sup>73</sup> Oceans and Fisheries Subcommittee. Science, Transportation, and Commerce Committee. [www.senate.gov/%7Ecommerce/issues/ocfish.htm](http://www.senate.gov/%7Ecommerce/issues/ocfish.htm). 8 February 2002.

<sup>74</sup> State Profile of Louisiana. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999.





106,026 live below the poverty level, making them dependent on the governmental senior citizen programs.<sup>75</sup> Senator Breaux, in response, serves as the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy and as a member of the Health Care Subcommittee of the Finance Committee. Furthermore, Senator Breaux is the Chairman to the Special Committee on Aging. These positions have enabled Senator Breaux to capitalize on the available and loyal voting block of Louisiana senior citizens. Senator Breaux's powerful positions on these subcommittees have allowed him to play a critical role in the drafting of legislation that is important to this block. He has worked on Social Security and Medicare reform bills, chaired the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare, and co-chaired the National Commission on Retirement Policy.<sup>76</sup> These are powerful positions nationally but serve to increase the safety of his seat by appealing to yet another large group of constituents. By combining his committee service with his original campaign strategies, Senator Breaux now maintains the support of the citizens of Louisiana's seventh district who are happy to see a local boy do good, African-American loyalists to the Democratic Party, Southern Louisiana's fishing and maritime trade employers and employees, and senior citizens.

Despite the connection between the Louisiana constituency and legislation for the elderly, issues such as Medicare, health care, and Social Security are ultimately national in their nature. This legislation, therefore, provides the best example of Breaux's two-fold attempt to simultaneously protect his seat and further his national identity. He has used aging legislation to extend his coalition of support at home by appealing to a broader selection of voters. However, he has also established himself as a powerful member of the Senate through his role in the drafting of such critical national legislation. As he further

---

[www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt](http://www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt). 5 March 2002.

<sup>75</sup>Income and Poverty Status in 1989: 1990. US Census Bureau.  
[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsTable?\\_lang=en&\\_vt\\_name=DEC\\_1990\\_STF3\\_DP4&\\_geo\\_id=04000US22](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsTable?_lang=en&_vt_name=DEC_1990_STF3_DP4&_geo_id=04000US22). 5 March 2002.

<sup>76</sup>Senator John Breaux--Biography. [www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html). 8 February 2000.



amplifies his position in the Senate, he has positively connected those positions of authority to positions of respect for Louisiana. When his roles as Chief Deputy Whip and a member of the important Finance Committee and the powerful Rules Committee have appeared to be too focused on Breaux's political aims and not the needs of his constituents, Breaux has been able to relate those positions to ones that increase the overall authority of Louisiana. Louisiana citizens are conscious of their state's low rankings in nearly every aspect of political, social, and economic importance and are proud to have a legislator who brings a Louisiana perspective to the national forefront. When then President-elect George W. Bush chose Senator Breaux as the first congressional Democrat he contacted, the newspapers in Louisiana reported it as a victory of Louisiana distinction. "Sen. John Breaux, D-La., who met Friday with Bush in Austin, had been Louisiana's hottest prospect for Cabinet-level position. But Breaux told President Bush he wants to remain in the Senate, where he is expected to be Bush's go-to guy on the Democratic side of the aisle. All of the attention from the president-elect is expected to dramatically heighten Breaux's clout in the evenly split Senate. One Capitol Hill Republican said that Breaux's newfound influence could rival that of Senate Democratic Leader Thomas Daschle of South Dakota. Breaux will be the "shadow minority leader," the source said."<sup>77</sup> Breaux's position of power has therefore been translated to one that brings Louisiana into the national debate, rather than one that neglects his home constituents.

In an attempt to further expand his own political power, Senator Breaux has become widely recognized on Capitol Hill as the Senate's dealmaker, able to forge bipartisan coalitions in support of important legislation. He is a member of the Centrist Coalition of Senate Democrats and succeeded Bill Clinton as chair of the Democratic Leadership Council in 1991.<sup>78</sup> The Democratic Leadership Council is an organization

---

<sup>77</sup> Bill Walsh. "State May have Large Contingent in Bush Administration." *The Times Picayune*. 17 December 2000. Lexis Nexis.

<sup>78</sup> Senator John Breaux--Biography. [www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html). 8 February 2000.



dedicated to returning the National Democratic Party to the center of American politics. Breaux, however, has served as more than just a moderate. He has instead claimed credit for creating coalitions, drafting nonpartisan legislation, and persuading bipartisan support for bills. This ability establishes him as a national player and explains the reason Bush was so eager to invite Breaux to his ranch in Austin. However, in the process of assuming so much political authority, Breaux has not been criticized for neglecting the needs of Louisiana. Instead, Louisiana newspapers gave Breaux credit for protecting his state's best interest by ensuring that his power in the Congress is safely secured. "Over the years, Sen. Breaux has planted himself in the ideological center and assiduously courted moderate Republican allies. Now he is in a unique position as a potential dealmaker. The Senate is split 50-50; Vice President-elect Dick Cheney will be the tiebreaker on the floor, but under an unusual power-sharing deal Republicans and Democrats will have equal numbers on committees. Moderates like Sen. Breaux will be able to broker compromises on a host of issues -- and safeguard their own states' interests."<sup>79</sup> Though the Senate is no longer evenly split, the Democrat's slim majority perpetuates the need for Breaux's deal-making ability. His capacity to continually convey his ability to create compromises as essential to Louisiana's national influence has enabled Breaux to simultaneously promote both his reelection goals and his own quest for greater political prestige.

Senator Breaux's willing-to-compromise attitude does not come without risks to a politician seeking reelection. Moderation is not always a popular stance in a career that requires heated debate. Taking a stand is, in politics, often a demonstration of strength, power, conviction, and determination and voters often appreciate these traits. Furthermore, Senate internal politics and norms are not consistently favorable to the legislator who is always looking to make a deal. Parties offer an impressive base of support but they expect unity and loyalty in return, expecting that "Democrats would act

---

<sup>79</sup> "More Clout in Congress." *The Times Picayune*. 11 January 2001. Lexis Nexis.



more like Democrats.”<sup>80</sup> Moderation opens an individual to attack from both sides of the political spectrum. During the debate over President Bush’s budget proposal, Breaux was simultaneously accused of giving too much to the GOP and not giving enough to his newfound ally, President Bush. A scholar of congressional studies at American University, Allan Lictman, commented on Breaux’s mixed review during the budget debate, saying: “You know what they say about those in the middle of the road: They get run over by the traffic on both sides.”<sup>81</sup> Senator Breaux has avoided this typical demise with some savvy political spin. Instead of losing his base of support, he has simply modified it. Senator Breaux has not alienated the people who brought him out of Crowley, Louisiana into Washington, DC. His intimate constituency, and actual state voting block, remains in tact and he therefore owes little the Democratic Party as a whole. Instead, he needs an established base of support on Capitol Hill, in order to better manage the waves of Senate internal politics. He has found these new allies in a group of politically popular centrists who appear to be in the Senate for the long haul. Furthermore, Breaux has set himself up as their leader. “It’s clear Breaux is very important,” said Nicholas Calio, Bush’s chief lobbyist in Congress. “He’s got a group of people working with him who basically, at least currently, won’t do anything without going through him.”<sup>82</sup> This alleviates Breaux of his moderate role and instead established him up as the leader of a new party, a party that exists within the walls of the Senate chambers alone, but wields power and authority in an institution determined to create the appearance of getting something done.

Senator Breaux has been able to successfully manage a career of constituent demands and political acclaim. Louisiana’s Democratic Party recognized Breaux’s

---

<sup>80</sup> Bruce Alpert. “Breaux Finds Himself Under Fire from Both Sides in the Senate; His Centrist Approach May Be to Blame.” *The Times Picayune*. 9 May 2001. Lexis Nexis.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>82</sup> Alan Fram. “Louisiana’s Breaux in Key Position to Affect Outcome of Bush Tax Cut.” *The Sunday Advocate*. 29 April 2001. Lexis Nexis.





popularity within the state and approached Senator Breaux with the possibility of running in the state's 2003 gubernatorial election. Senator Breaux declined the invitation, amid much speculation, claiming that "after weighing all the advice and counsel, I think that I can be most effective in helping Louisiana grow and prosper by continuing to serve in the U.S. Senate. Louisiana has a 30-year investment in me that cannot be discounted."<sup>83</sup> This simple statement was a brilliant tactical move in Breaux's continuing attempt to protect the safety of his seat. At first glance, it would seem that declining the invitation to run in Louisiana's gubernatorial campaign would, in today's politics, indicate that Breaux was fully entrenched in the Washington political machine and far removed from his voters. Instead, Breaux's response created the appearance that he was almost regretfully refusing a personally attractive and lucrative offer because he was obligated to the citizen's of Louisiana. This simple response maintains Breaux's powerful position in the Senate while at the same time reaffirming his commitment to his home state.

Senator Breaux has not always walked the party line. On March 20 Breaux was one of only two Senate Democrats to vote against the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, Senator Breaux has not always focused exclusively on the constituent demands of his state. However, Senator Breaux has never forgotten that his prestige, his power, and the very livelihood of his career revolve around his ability to win elections every six years. In every vote he has cast and every bill he has sponsored, he has assumed the responsibility for his actions by returning his name to the voting ballot. The balancing act he has played between the demands of power and the demands of constituency have served him well overall, and he has reaped the rewards. By behaving in a manner best suited to his reelection goals, Senator Breaux has protected his seat and created the ability to pursue other, secondary political aims as well. This type of career is

---

<sup>83</sup> "Senator Breaux's Statement on Louisiana Governor's Race." Senator John Breaux. [www.senate.gov/~breaux/releases/2002104808.html](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux/releases/2002104808.html). 3 January 2002.

<sup>84</sup> Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. H.R. 2356. US Senate Roll Call Votes. [www.senate.gov/legislative/vote1072/vote\\_00054.html](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/vote1072/vote_00054.html). 20 March 2002.



the culmination of Congressman X's professional life because Senator Breaux has utilized the behavioral tactics at his disposal to advance his own best interests. Rational choice, the benefits of incumbency, the drive towards reelection, and the desire to maximize his potential have all played a part in Senator Breaux's rise to power. Louisiana did not change the nature of his behavior nor exempt him from performing the same tasks that scholars have created for Congressman X.



**Senator Mary Landrieu**  
**(D-LA)**



Mary Landrieu (D-LA) is on the verge of completing her first term in the Senate. She offers a much different perspective on congressional behavior because her seat is marginal and her 2006 reelection campaign is expected to be challenging. Landrieu's rise to the Senate and how she has translated her barely successful campaign into a legislative career dedicated to reelection will thus serve as the a critical look at the application of political theory. This chapter will establish that the nature of the behavior of recently established incumbents from Louisiana is the same as the nature of overall congressional behavior. In Louisiana, as anywhere, political spin, committee selection, and DC and home-style all serve to influence a member's image among the voting public. Mary Landrieu's rise to and service in the Senate have been virtually a textbook example of how continual concentration on elections has shaped political careers.

Mary L. Landrieu was one of nine children born to a controversial and yet extremely popular mayor of New Orleans, Moon Landrieu. Senator Landrieu was therefore raised in very political family where her civic training began early. Her father's personal influence on his children and, quite frankly, his recognizable name (which Landrieu deliberately kept as her surname after marriage) were extremely important in Landrieu's original senatorial campaign. Added to her father's assistance, Senator Landrieu herself was able to capitalize on the fact that her upbringing occurred almost entirely within the state of Louisiana. Though she was born in Arlington, Virginia, she spent the majority of her childhood in New Orleans. She graduated from the most notable university in the state, Louisiana State University, and went on to work, reside, and start a family in the capital city of Baton Rouge. Increasing her area of influence, Landrieu married Frank Snellings, an attorney from Monroe in northern Louisiana, nearly seven hours from New Orleans, in 1988.<sup>85</sup>

Senator Landrieu began to achieve her political destiny early. Though her previous

---

<sup>85</sup> Biography of Senator Mary Landrieu. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu/biography](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/biography). 23 February 2002.





professional experience is listed as real estate, Landrieu was elected to the Louisiana House of Representatives at the young age of 23, only two years after her graduation from college. Her career in real estate was thus extremely short. She served two terms in the Louisiana House from 1980 to 1987. In 1988 Landrieu ran for the position of Louisiana State Treasurer. She won this campaign and was reelected in an unopposed election four years later. In 1995 Landrieu had hopes of becoming the first female governor of Louisiana.<sup>86</sup> However, she was up against Mike Foster and lost. This defeat did not end Senator Landrieu's career, and so in 1996 she ran for the United States Senate. Her transformation from state and local politics was a difficult one and she was elected by one of the narrowest margins in Louisiana history, defeating her opponent Woody Jenkins by only 5,788 votes. Therefore, by a margin of only .34 percent, Landrieu was elected to the Senate.<sup>87</sup> The closeness of Landrieu's campaign makes her an easy target for Republican challengers in 2002. It is, therefore, critical to Senator Landrieu's continuing career as a United States senator that she has portrayed herself as indispensable and always *doing something*. Though Landrieu has sponsored and supported numerous amounts of national legislation, her main concern has been to endorse legislation that will, at least in the minds of her constituency, confront the areas of concern in her state and promote the areas of both pride and achievement.

Having grown up in a political household, Senator Landrieu was evidently taught the value of keeping her friends close and her intimate constituency as her most trusted allies. When Landrieu was elected to the US Senate, she took the seat of a man named J. Bennett Johnston, Jr. Johnston served in the Senate from 1972 to 1997, making him one of only seventeen senators from Louisiana to complete the full six-year term and proving him to be a very popular representative.<sup>88</sup> Remembering this when she came into office,

---

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Federal Election Results, 1996. Official Election Results by State-- US Senate. Federal Election Commission. [www.fec.gov/pubrec/senate.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/senate.htm). 20 March 2002.

<sup>88</sup> J. Bennett Johnston, Jr. [www.bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=J000189](http://www.bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=J000189). 23 February



Landrieu maintained or even promoted ten long-time staffers of Johnston's, thus effectively claiming Johnston's base of support as her own and increasing her margin of votes. Other members of her staff have worked or associated with people influential in the leadership of Louisiana, including Governor Mike Foster, New Orleans District Attorney Harry Connick, and former, and now notorious, Representative Cleo Fields. Twenty-six members of Landrieu's staff are natives of varying parts of Louisiana, and even more have graduated from Louisiana universities. Several have followed Senator Landrieu through numerous campaigns and career moves. Abby Carter, for instance, was an average but avid volunteer on Landrieu's gubernatorial campaign and was promoted to the staff position of legislative correspondent in recognition of her hard work and loyalty. Landrieu's Chief of Staff, and closest advisor, Norma Jane Sabison, met Landrieu while the two were in high school, riding next to each other on a bus to hear a young congressman named John Breaux speak at the Louisiana Youth Conference.<sup>89</sup> Numerous others on her staff are examples of friends and intimate constituents. It is a politician's intimate constituency who will support her the longest and whose loss would hurt her the most. Senator Landrieu is evidently of the opinion that there is no better way to keep them happy than to hire them onto her paid staff and keep them by her side.

Unfortunately, the support of friends, family, and loyal staff are not the only keys to election in modern politics. Money, most certainly, talks and when it does congressman are often born. The contributions a politician receives are often accurate gauges of a candidate's ability to win. To understand campaign contributions is to understand, in many ways, the number of people who have a personal stake in a candidate's success, the type of legislation a member will champion in order to retain the support of certain interest groups and activists, and the candidate's recognition of the issues that are of central importance to either many of her constituents or a few of her more powerful ones.

---

2002.

<sup>89</sup> Mary Landrieu's Team. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu.office](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu.office). 23 February 2002.



Senator Landrieu's campaign finances can serve the same predictable purpose. During the 2001-2002 election cycle, Landrieu has raised an impressive \$2,093,764. The majority of her financial support (\$1,162,021) came from individual donors rather than interest groups, a fact that is important because it demonstrates the support of numerous voters rather than that of one wealthy group who is capable of providing the funds but not the votes. During her time in the Senate, Landrieu has created three fund raising committees: Friends of Mary Landrieu Inc., Mary Landrieu for Senate Committee Inc., and The Louisiana Contested Election Fund. These three committees have gathered 1,965 individual contributions. Of those, 451 gave donations of \$500 or less.<sup>90</sup> Citizens who give donations of smaller amounts are essential to an aspiring candidate. Donations of \$500 or less represent individuals whose support is so strong that they are willing to give money that they may actually need and expect little or nothing in return. These donors are likely to become volunteers, pamphlet-makers and doorknockers, and are often faithful to the candidate's cause, without the benefit of direct personal profit.

Individual donors, however, cannot support a candidate alone. Political Action Committees, political parties, and interest groups have the ability to pull some very powerful purse strings. These groups, however, expect assistance and support in return. Political parties, for instance, expect endorsements for the party and party legislation. PACs act in a similar manner. Landrieu received large amounts of her PAC support from those representing energy and natural resource concerns.<sup>91</sup> Louisiana leads many states in the supply and distribution of natural resources and groups representing those issues have a powerful presence within the state. It is therefore only natural that they would choose a candidate, in this case Landrieu, and support her campaign. Those involved in the business of energy and natural resources who supported her successful campaign are likely to expect

---

<sup>90</sup>FEC Candidate Summary Reports-- Landrieu, Mary L. Federal Election Commission. [www.herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/cancomsrs/?\\_02+S6LA00227](http://www.herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/cancomsrs/?_02+S6LA00227). 25 March 2002.

<sup>91</sup>FEC Disclosure Reports-- Committees Who Gave to Landrieu, Mary L. Federal Election Commission. [http://herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/can\\_give/S6LA00227](http://herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/can_give/S6LA00227). 25 March 2002.



something in return for their assistance. After all, PACs and members of political parties are types of constituents, even if they do not live in a member's district, because they assist a member with her proximate goal of reelection in return for the fulfillment of some of their legislative desires. Unwilling to lose the support of her most generous supporters, Senator Landrieu is a member of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.<sup>92</sup> Service on this committee gives Senator Landrieu the twin benefits of both appealing to the interests of her constituencies and fulfilling the demands of her PAC supporters. PACs for energy and natural resources, however, are not the only ones who support Landrieu. Her campaign was also funded in large amounts by PAC's for small businesses in local Louisiana, thanked now by Landrieu's position on the Committee for Small Businesses, an important group in any state.<sup>93</sup> Landrieu's political positions and congressional actions, like all members, are thus guided, if not dictated, by the needs, desires, and complaints of the individuals who provide her with support, both monetarily and at the voting booth. Should she alienate them, or should an opposing candidate influence her appearance of alienation from one of her critical financiers, she will certainly lose their funding and likely her reelection. Fenno's theory, therefore, that committee selection is an integral part of Congressman X's reelection goals has been utilized and expanded by Landrieu to accommodate the need to raise enormous funds when launching a congressional campaign.

The most important aspect of a member's role orientation is therefore the committees and subcommittees on which she serves. It is those committees which demonstrate what a member truly perceives her role to be: one of a career member of Congress or one who is using Congress as a stepping ground to higher political objectives. The amount of concern a member has regarding reelection is also evident from the committees on which she serves. The same is true of Senator Landrieu. Landrieu is a

---

<sup>92</sup>About Mary-- Committees. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/committees.htm](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/committees.htm). 23 February 2002.

<sup>93</sup>FEC Disclosure Reports-- Committees Who Gave to Landrieu, Mary L. Federal Election Commission. [http://herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/can\\_give/S6LA00227](http://herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/can_give/S6LA00227). 25 March 2002.





member of the Armed Services Committee, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and the Small Business Committee, and the powerful Appropriations Committee. These committees represent Landrieu's newly created need to balance national ambitions with constituent concerns. The Armed Services Committee and the Appropriations Committee are incredibly influential committees of national proportions. However, Landrieu's need to ensure the safety of her seat does not allow her the same freedom afforded to Senator Breaux to devote high levels of attention to national legislation. Therefore in order to further increase her rising approval ratings, Senator Landrieu serves on two committees crucial to her state constituencies, splitting her committee time. While Landrieu's eyes may be directed towards higher levels of the United States government, her reelection depends on her ability to at least appear to be essential to the success of her state. Understanding this, Landrieu has managed to split her committee roles between the possibilities of reelection and of promotion.

Following in the footsteps of Senator Breaux, Landrieu has attempted to portray herself as a moderate Democrat. However, her position as such is less a statement of political ideology than it is a response to the voting climate of Louisiana. Louisiana has demonstrated a significant amount of diversity with regards to political ideology, having switched parties in the governor's office with the election of Mike Foster, the first Republican in the Governor's Mansion since Reconstruction. There are two Democrats serving in the Senate, and five Republicans and two Democrats in the House. In Landrieu's 1996 senatorial race, 852,945 registered Democrats and 847,157 registered Republicans voted.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, party loyalty in Louisiana is far from extreme levels and moderation is a key. It is difficult, however, for a newly elected Senator to go against the party line and maintain the party's critical electoral support. Therefore, Landrieu has learned to spin her moderation so as to accommodate both the demands of the Democratic

---

<sup>94</sup>Federal Election Results, 1996. Votes Cast by Party for the US Senate. Federal Election Commission. [www.fec.gov/pubrec/partysen.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/partysen.htm). 20 March 2002.



Party and the centrist views of her constituency. The most drastic example of Landrieu's use of spin is her stance on abortion. Landrieu is technically pro-choice but has moderated this view, most likely in response to the heavy Catholic population in her home base of New Orleans. There is very little current legislation in the Senate that requires Landrieu to vote for or against abortion policies and she has therefore not been required to address the issue directly. Landrieu avoids such direct confrontation through the promotion of adoption legislation, touting adoption as an alternative to abortion. Landrieu serves as the co-chair of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption and in 2001 the Senate passed the Landrieu amendment to double the adoption tax credit.<sup>95</sup> Further demonstrating her faith in adoption, as opposed to abortion, Landrieu is the mother of two adopted children herself. When defending a bill that guaranteed equal protection under the law and immediate citizenship to children adopted from foreign countries, Landrieu brought her children into the political sphere: "As the mother of two beautiful adopted children, I can say there is no difference to a parent between an adopted or a biological child and there should be no difference in their treatment under the law."<sup>96</sup> The use of her children as a tactic adds a new and powerful dimension to her political spin and demonstrates how desperately congressmen perceive their need to align themselves with their constituency.

Senator Landrieu differs from the established generic congressman in one critical respect: her sex. Throughout this thesis, Congressman X has been referred to as a male. This was not done merely for stylistic simplicity, but rather because the generic congressman is typically male. As one of only thirteen women currently serving in the US Senate, Mary Landrieu has already dismissed congressional norms. Her sex, however, is perhaps her only anomaly and, upon further investigation, merely becomes yet another tool used by Landrieu to brand herself indispensable. January 7, 1997 marks an important date

---

<sup>95</sup> "Senate passes Landrieu Amendment to Double Adoption Tax Credit." Senator Mary Landrieu. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/01/2001524A50.html](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/01/2001524A50.html). 20 March 2002.

<sup>96</sup> "New Law Smooths the Road to International Adoption." Senator Mary Landrieu. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/columns/intl adoption.html](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/columns/intl adoption.html). 20 March 2002.



for both Landrieu and the women of her state. On that day Landrieu became the first woman from Louisiana to be inaugurated into the United States Senate. Unlike those before her, Senator Landrieu has used her gender to her benefit. The female population of Louisiana is slightly greater than that of the male, representing 51.6 percent of the state's overall population, and it is highly possible that it was that slight majority who gave Landrieu the 5,788 votes that tilted the highly contested election in her favor.<sup>97</sup> Using her sex, Landrieu has sponsored legislation that appeals to women, mothers, and wives, across party boundaries. She has sponsored and co-sponsored numerous pieces of female-based legislation such as a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to provide for awards by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences to develop and operate multidisciplinary research centers regarding the impact of environmental factors on women's health and disease prevention, a concurrent resolution recognizing the social problems of child abuse and neglect, and supporting efforts to enhance public awareness of it, and a bill to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide more effective remedies to victims of discrimination in the payment of wages on the basis of sex.<sup>98</sup> The over 2,234,400 women living in Louisiana have claimed her as their champion. She has portrayed herself as someone who works specifically for the needs of Louisiana's women and has thus further protected the safety of her seat by working on the Hill to maintain a loyal female voting base.<sup>99</sup>

Senator Landrieu has also sponsored and supported legislation that would appeal to nearly any voter, regardless of gender. This type of legislation serves to attract select members of a member's constituency. For instance, Landrieu supported resolutions acknowledging the dedication of those who have lost their lives fulfilling their duty as law

---

<sup>97</sup> State and County Quick Facts. US Census Bureau. [www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html). 5 March 2000.

<sup>98</sup> Bill Search, 107th Congress. [www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov). 20 March 2002.

<sup>99</sup> State and County Quick Facts. US Census Bureau. [www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html). 5 March 2000.



enforcement officers, designating May as the National Military Appreciation Month, and the issue of a commemorative stamp in honor the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.<sup>100</sup> While this type of legislation may not seem to be truly necessary or important, it is nonetheless brilliant constituent politics and takes up a lot of a congressman's time. Every time a member of the VFW sees that stamp, Landrieu, and all those who voted like her, has the potential of earning another vote for her reelection. Legislation that draws on the pride of her constituency is the exclusive property of an incumbent. It builds a level of necessity that an opponent who was not in office can only tear down in order to match.

It would be politically dangerous for Senator Landrieu to use her time in Washington to focus exclusively on legislation that is either gender-based or PAC-oriented. While certain pieces of legislation serve to attract a broader voting base, the ultimate responsibility of a senator is to address the needs of her state. Along with her colleague, Senator Breaux, Landrieu has been able to sponsor and co-sponsor bills that have brought millions of dollars and other benefits back to Louisiana. Recognizing the peril of children in her state, as Louisiana ranks fiftieth among the states for the well being of its children, one of the first pieces of legislation that Senator Landrieu supported was a bill known as Steps to Success. Steps to Success promotes the use of technology to coordinate public and private efforts to help children, the empowerment of parents, and the increased use of volunteers to mentor children. Through this program, seven parishes in Louisiana were given generous federal grants to improve technology within the classroom.<sup>101</sup> When the budget surplus was announced, Landrieu worked for the allocation of surplus funds that would allow Louisiana to hire 100,000 new teachers and to provide direct cash assistance for Louisiana's farmers who, in 1998, suffered from the

---

<sup>100</sup> Bill Search, 107th Congress. [www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov). 20 March 2002.

<sup>101</sup> "Steps to Success." Senator Mary Landrieu. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/steps.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/steps.cfm). 20 March 2002.





worst drought in a century.<sup>102</sup> Each of these pieces of legislation address issues that are of serious concern within the state (the poor health of Louisiana's children, the diminishing number of teachers, and the recent drought) and Landrieu's participation in addressing these concerns has allowed her to claim the role as her state's indispensable savior.

Like Congressman X, Senator Landrieu's immediate goal is reelection. The marginal nature of her seat increases her desperation to behave in Congress in a manner focused on her own political needs. Landrieu has thus used all of the tools at her disposal, including her sex, her children, and constituent service to ensure her reelection to the Senate. Upcoming elections will prove how effective incumbency can be in achieving reelection goals, but Landrieu's service in the Senate has demonstrated member's reliance on incumbency as a political weapon. Landrieu's service on Capitol Hill, or rather her DC style, will be transmitted into her home style throughout the upcoming campaign and she will be judged on her ability to convey her own necessity. Landrieu's recent poll numbers prove that legislative service is a candidate's strongest asset. In 1996, Mary Landrieu won a race that was so bitter and close it was contested in Louisiana courts. Now, just six years later, her former opponent Woody Jenkins is virtually forgotten, overcome by the incumbent's name recognition and constituent services. In a recent poll done by a Louisiana political analyst, 43 percent of the individuals polled chose Mary Landrieu from a list packed with well-known politicians as their first choice to win the 2002 Senate elections.<sup>103</sup> Though these polls do not guarantee election success, they do demonstrate how much ground Senator Landrieu has earned after six years as Louisiana's senator.

---

<sup>102</sup> "Breaux and Landrieu Announce Budget Victories for Louisiana." Senator Mary Landrieu. [www.landrieu.senate.gov/releases](http://www.landrieu.senate.gov/releases). 20 March 2002.

<sup>103</sup> The poll interviewed 750 people from various parts of Louisiana and asked them to choose from a list that included Senator Landrieu, U.S. Representative John Cooksey, Elections Commissioner Suzanne Terrell, Public Service Commissioner Jay Blossman, and U.S. Rep. David Vitter. Only Cooksey and Terrell have declared their candidacy in the race. Vitter has declined. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.6 percentage points.

"Poll: Incumbent Landrieu Remains Heavy Favorite for Senate." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. 13 January 2002. Lexis Nexis.



Regardless of the eventual outcome of the race, Landrieu's service has demonstrated that while Louisiana constituents may have different needs than the constituents of another state, the nature of the behavior they expect from their members is the same. All members of Congress, including Mary Landrieu, are required and compelled to utilize all political tools at their disposal to advance their own self-interest.



**Representative David Vitter**  
**(R-LA)**  
**First District**



Congressman David Vitter (R-LA) is at an odd position in political careers. He was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1999 through a special election after the resignation of Representative Bob Livingston (R-LA). He therefore started his career in the middle of someone else's. Livingston was a powerful member of the House and, despite the cloud of scandal under which he resigned, he left Vitter with enormous shoes to fill. Furthermore, Vitter's first campaign for national office was rushed by the circumstances and Vitter was left to sort out the details later. In an attempt to make the transition from campaigning to legislation, and to make it quickly, Vitter has dedicated the majority of his time in Congress to strict constituent service. According to the Congressman X model, the Congress creates a series of mechanisms, such as bureaucracy, through which they can further advance the interests of their constituents, thus in turn advancing their own reelection goals. Though Vitter has begun to assert himself through legislative mechanisms, rather than simple constituent service, his very-junior status in the House has compelled him to focus the majority of his attention on strictly fulfilling the needs of his district.

Congressman Vitter is very much a creature of his district. Born in Metairie, Louisiana, Vitter embodies the white-collar, well-educated, and suburban mentality of his district. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University. He was chosen to study as a Rhodes Scholar and received a history and economics degree from Oxford University. In his final educational endeavor, Vitter graduated with honors from New Orleans' own Tulane University Law School. Before election to the House of Representatives, Vitter was a well-respected business attorney, an adjunct law professor at Tulane and Loyola Universities, and a member of the state legislature. Congressman Vitter and his wife now have four young children and are active members of Francis Xavier Catholic Church.<sup>104</sup> The first district, a suburban area that surrounds New Orleans, is overwhelmingly

---

<sup>104</sup>Biography of Congressman David Vitter. [www.vitter.house.gov/bio.asp](http://www.vitter.house.gov/bio.asp). 25 March 2002.





populated by white, middle-class, and well-educated families.<sup>105</sup> Vitter's pedigree, indeed his resume, could not have been more appropriate for the first district. His educational experience was translated by other well-educated individuals into the skills necessary to be a politician. Vitter's broad education, which included more than just a BA and JD, has perhaps made him more aware of the existence of Congressman X than other members, and his early years in Congress have been an experiment in recreating himself into the very individual this thesis has created on paper. In fact, the attributes of Congressman X can be traced down the line and in order against the attributes of Congressman Vitter to demonstrate that he truly *is* Congressman X.

According to *Political Ambition*, potential candidates must consider the context of the campaign, weighing the potential costs of campaigning against the potential benefits of election. Sometimes it is simply the wrong time or the wrong place to launch a successful campaign. The context of Congressman Vitter's campaign could not have been better. When Representative Livingston resigned, the state needed a representative in a hurry, and the damaged Republican Party was desperate to fill that vacancy. His opponent, former Governor David Treen, was a popular Democrat but widely criticized for his association with David Duke. Sadly, the context of Vitter's campaign changed when Treen's grandson went missing while backpacking through Oregon just days before the election. Vitter was able to capitalize on his party's support and Treen's personal distraction. Treen's grandson was eventually found but Vitter won the election by less than 2,000 votes.<sup>106</sup> However, the special election to replace Bob Livingston occurred in 1999, thereby requiring Vitter to launch his first full campaign just one year later in 2000. Again the context of Vitter's campaign was perfect. Louisiana is a state slowly emerging from its Solid South

---

<sup>105</sup> 515,665 citizens of the first district are white, 55.4% of all households in the first district are occupied by families and married-couples, and the average value of homes in the first district is \$75, 500. Census of Population and Housing, District 1 of Louisiana, 1990. US Census Bureau. [www.census.gov/datamaped/22/01prof.txt](http://www.census.gov/datamaped/22/01prof.txt). 5 March 2002.

<sup>106</sup> Stephanie Grace. "Vitter Ready to Put House Staff Together; Victor Waiting for Treen to Call." *The Times Picayune*. 31 May 1999. Lexis Nexis.



Democratic dominance and the first district has lead the way in this move towards the right. Congressman Vitter's conservative nature and the enormous assistance provided to him by the Republican Party was enough to convince the first district to reelect him for at least one full term. In 2000 Congressman Vitter received 80.48 percent of the vote, defeating his Democratic opponent by a wider margin than John Breaux's last campaign.<sup>107</sup> Blind support for the Republican Party was not the only factor leading to Vitter's landslide victory. His attention to the needs of his constituency through constituent service, committee selection, and roll call voting is perhaps the most focused and dedicated of anyone in the Louisiana delegation.

Roll call votes are an important aspect to understanding rational choice theory because they are an easy way of determining what goals an individual is working towards. For instance, the roll call votes of Senator Breaux demonstrate that he has earned the freedom to pursue goals outside of reelection. For "single minded seekers of reelection" roll calls demonstrate how members have used the benefits of incumbency to further their own self-interest and increase their reelection potential. Unwilling to lose his largest base of electoral support, the Republican Party, Vitter's voting habits have followed the party line nearly every time. From economic assistance to terrorism to taxes to retirement, Vitter has joined his party loyally. In fact, in a random sampling of roll call votes, Vitter has voted with the Republican majority, without fail, from motion H.R. 466 to H.R. 499.<sup>108</sup> Vitter has used his roll call votes thirty-three consecutive times to further convey his loyalty to the Republican Party, thus promoting his own reelection potential by firmly securing his original volunteer and voting base.

Simply serving as puppet to the Republican machine would likely not be enough to appease Congressman Vitter's constituents in the first district. He has, therefore, used his

---

<sup>107</sup> Federal Election Results, 2000. Official Election Results by State-- US House of Representatives. [www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2000/lah.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2000/lah.htm). 20 March 2002.

<sup>108</sup> Roll Call Votes, 107th Session. Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives. [www.clerkweb.house.gov/cvs/2001/Roll\\_400.asp](http://www.clerkweb.house.gov/cvs/2001/Roll_400.asp) 25 March 2002.



roll call votes for yet another purpose. Roll calls publish votes for and against legislation, but they also publish who did not vote at all. Sometimes this occurs because a member feels an obligation to recuse himself from certain legislation, but often members who are safe in their seats feel free to avoid voting on issues that they do not feel address their own interests. Vitter, however, was present on the House floor to literally stand up and be counted for those thirty-three consecutive votes and more.<sup>109</sup> If the benefit of incumbency is the ability to create an appearance of action, and indispensability, then Vitter has achieved that simply by always being there, always taking part in the action. Legislation is often times complex and erudite, and therefore inaccessible to the average citizen, but everyone can understand that simple involvement is the first and most vital step towards positive results.

Congressman Vitter has cultivated his home style by attention not simply to constituent needs but to constituent service instead. Every member used in this paper maintains a website dedicated to what he can do for his constituents. Most of those websites are short and simple, focusing more attention on what the member has done for his constituents while serving in DC than what he can do for them at home. Congressman Vitter's website on constituent service, however, lists thirteen ways in which he can serve the direct needs of his constituents. On the other hand, Vitter's DC style is relegated to a mere seven links of press releases. Vitter's contact information, unlike Mary Landrieu's, offers more than just e-mail access. Instead, he readily publishes phone and address information for each of his home offices, as well as his office in Washington, DC. He offers help with internships, nominations to Service Academies, information on requesting presidential greetings, applications to the congressional page program, and a visitors guide to Washington, DC. Furthermore, Vitter publishes the activities of his District staff to make his constituents aware of their outreach programs.<sup>110</sup> Meeting

---

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Constituent Services of Congressman David Vitter. [www.vitter.house.gov/Constituent\\_Services.asp](http://www.vitter.house.gov/Constituent_Services.asp). 25



Vitter's staff and discussing very personal concerns is not only possible with Congressman Vitter but is in fact promoted. This ability to devote the attention of an entire office staff to the individual needs of his constituency serves to convince his constituents that only he is concerned with their specific needs. Furthermore, Congressman Vitter does not simply lay the burden of personal constituent service on his staff. He himself has returned to the district, even maintaining a house in both Metairie and Washington, on numerous occasions to address constituent needs. In fact, "Vitter expects to spend every weekend back home in the district. He and his wife, Wendy, have decided not to make Washington their home and will raise their three young daughters in Metairie, he said."<sup>111</sup> From February 23 to February 25 of 2002, Vitter returned home to host a series of town meetings throughout the first district. These meetings were held in six towns within the district, were open to the public, and lasted about two hours each. Constituents were allowed to attend these meetings to hear Congressman Vitter speak on what he had done for their interests while serving on Capitol Hill, but more importantly they were allowed to come and speak directly to him, ensuring themselves that their concerns were heard. This obvious attention to home style has become Vitter's calling card and is his way of convincing his constituents that he is indispensable. Vitter has therefore accepted his theoretical obligation to behave at home, and to work at home, in a manner that will increase his own self-interest.

Congressman Vitter has come so close to transforming himself into Congressman X that he has openly expanded his constituent service to include help with governmental bureaucracies. On his constituent website, the second link provides Vitter's constituents with information on dealing with federal agencies and contact information to provide further assistance. His own personal staff is, according to his own advertisement, "trained" and "ready to help constituents solve problems with the federal government."<sup>112</sup> The

---

March 2002.

<sup>111</sup> Grace, Stephanie. "Vitter Ready to Put House Staff Together; Victor Waiting for Treen to Call." *The Times Picayune*. 31 May 1999. Lexis Nexis.

<sup>112</sup> Constituent Services of Congressman David Vitter. [www.vitter.house.gov/Constituent\\_Services.asp](http://www.vitter.house.gov/Constituent_Services.asp). 25





federal bureaucracy, however, is not the only area in which Vitter offers assistance. He provides a link to direct problems brought to his attention that are under the jurisdiction of state and local government and advice on contacting the appropriate officials. He also offers help to businesses within his community who need to obtain permits and licenses, help to organizations and individuals who are applying for federal grants, and assistance to students in need of educational loans. Though Vitter may actually do very little to aid his constituents with these bureaucratic concerns, his commitment to pointing them in the right direction and appearing helpful in these problematic areas has further increased his aura of indispensability.

Despite the overwhelming time and attention Congressman Vitter has put into cultivating his home style, he has not forgotten his responsibility to behave in Washington in a manner best suited to his reelection needs. As already mentioned, his roll call records enhance his Republican allies while allowing him to take credit for perpetual involvement. Vitter's committee selection has further advanced his appearance of indispensability by placing him in the forefront of influence and power in the House of Representatives very quickly. Congressman Vitter serves as a member of the immensely powerful House Appropriations Committee. Appropriations is responsible for determining how, when, and where the nation's trillion-dollar budget will be spent. This committee can nearly single-handedly sustain or destroy governmental programs and Vitter has ensured that Louisiana plays an integral part of that process. Not only does Vitter's position serve to increase the prestige and power of the Louisiana House delegation, it also creates the sense among his constituents that Vitter must be doing something right, to have assumed such a powerful position in such a short amount of time. "Once weakened by a series of retirements, Louisiana's influence in Congress has suddenly rebounded....,Rep. David Vitter, R-Metairie, beat out several candidates for a coveted seat on the money-dispensing



House Appropriations Committee.”<sup>113</sup> Vitter, according to this journalist, did not simply assume a seat on the Appropriations Committee but instead went after it and achieved his goals over members from other states to return Louisiana to its rightful position in national politics. This coup captured considerable credit for Vitter. More importantly, he has assumed the role of perpetual campaigner so well that he has the newspapers claiming the credit for him.

The largest challenge to Congressman Vitter’s career will likely occur in his upcoming reelection campaign. When Senator Breaux was considering the option of running for governor in 2003, there was intense speculation that Vitter was contemplating running for his vacated seat. Vitter’s outspoken determination to ensure that Mary Landrieu is defeated in her upcoming reelection bid has convinced many political speculators that he will run against her.<sup>114</sup> Though he has officially declared his candidacy in the November primary for election to the House of Representatives, complete with \$1,003,705 on hand to use in the campaign, he has also told Republican Party leaders that he is considering announcing his candidacy in the 2003 gubernatorial election.<sup>115</sup> Vitter, therefore, runs the risk of appearing too wholesale and selling himself to the state rather than his district as he sets his sights on higher offices. He has attempted to avoid this appearance with an array of constituent service and party loyalty. Even as recent debate, notably over the renovation of the New Orleans International Airport and Indian gaming rights, has made Vitter a target for heavy political opposition from both his own party and the left, his enemies have been overshadowed by almost four years of legislative service.

---

<sup>113</sup> Joan McKinney. “Louisiana Regaining Congressional Clout.” *The Morning Advocate*. 6 January 2001. Lexis Nexis.

<sup>114</sup> Vitter was quoted saying “We really need to get Mary Landrieu out.”

Anderson, Ed. “Vitter Envisions a Rough Campaign.” *The Times Picayune*. 10 March 2002. Lexis Nexis.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.* and FEC Candidate Summary Report-- Vitter, David B. Federal Election Commission. [www.herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/canconmsrs/??\\_02+HOLA01079](http://www.herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/canconmsrs/??_02+HOLA01079). 25 March 2002.



**Congressman William J. Jefferson**

**(D-LA)**

**Second District**



Congressman William Jennings Jefferson (R-LA) has established a safe seat in the United States House of Representatives by embracing Congressman X's need simultaneously to win reelection and create a legislative record that further promotes reelection and congressional goals. He has cultivated both his DC and home style to best support his reelection goals and has, in fact, assumed both facets of congressional behavior into his very personality. Jefferson has appropriately blended these two spheres of congressional politics into his own personality, making himself into an indispensable representative. On one hand, Congressman Jefferson has established himself as a man of the people, specifically the people of New Orleans. On the other, however, he has fully joined the ranks of the Washington elite. These two roles, when juxtaposed against each other, serve to make Jefferson the consummate politician, utterly electable and yet simultaneously capable of maneuvering through DC insider politics. The man best suited for election from a particular district is not always equally prepared to legislate. Congressman Jefferson, however, has embraced both aspects of politics, playing them off of each other to create Congressman X's aura of indispensability.

Congressman Jefferson has emphasized his position as a common man, selling himself as a man in touch with the people of his district. He shares, or so he claims, their wants, their attitudes, and their personalities. When the people of New Orleans have fun, at Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest, for instance, he has fun. When they are worried, he is worried. He is not simply their representative; he is one of them. In fact, Congressman Jefferson is a lifelong resident of Louisiana. He graduated from Southern University A&M College in Baton Rouge and, after law school in the northeast, went on to develop a career inside Louisiana. His resume includes service in the Louisiana State Senate, work as a law clerk to Judge Alvin B. Rubin of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana, and a short time as a legislative assistant to Louisiana's former U.S. Senator J. Bennett Johnston. Before entering the political sphere, Jefferson worked as a law partner





at a firm based in Louisiana. Jefferson's life outside of his education and career has gone even further to demonstrate his utter New Orleans-ness. He and his wife have raised five daughters in New Orleans, remaining in the city even after he was elected to the House of Representatives. They attend church as a family at New Orleans' St. Stephen Full Gospel Baptist Church, where he serves on the Church's Board of Trustees. His daughters each attended high school in Louisiana, and his youngest is still a senior at Benjamin Franklin Senior High School, one of New Orleans' most notable magnet schools.<sup>116</sup> In an area where even the magnet and private schools are criticized for low educational standards, it is a strong statement of loyalty to the city he serves that his children attend local schools. Congressman Jefferson has not used his election to the House to escape from the dangers, troubles, and uncertainties of New Orleans city life but has, instead, promoted himself as a man who, after a lifetime of living amongst these difficulties, is determined to change New Orleans' direction. The cliché phrase, "it takes one to know one," could be Jefferson's motto, demonstrating his campaign assertion that personal experience has equipped him to understand and overcome the issues facing the citizens of New Orleans.

Congressman Jefferson has gone further than simply establishing his residency in New Orleans. His public image is one of a typical New Orleanian, speaking in the vernacular and associating himself with the culture of the city. His website, for instance, is indicative of his New Orleans style. Of the thirty-seven links on Congressman Jefferson's website, six of them are written in a Creole, city dialect that is understood only by the true New Orleanian. Chuck Taggart wrote a dictionary compilation of words and phrases specific to the New Orleanian dialect, known as "Yat-Speak." Jefferson has used this dictionary to fill his website with phrases such as "Where ya at," "Makin groceries," and "Lagniappe."<sup>117</sup> Though these phrases may seem meaningless and unimportant in the

---

<sup>116</sup>Biography of Congressman William J. Jefferson. [www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm](http://www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm). 20 March 2002.

<sup>117</sup>Welcome, from Congressman William J. Jefferson. [www.house.gov/jefferson/welcome.htm](http://www.house.gov/jefferson/welcome.htm). 10 March 2002.



sphere of congressional behavior, they are critical to election strategies. Using this dialect and incorporating the words of the people into his campaign speeches and publications makes him more than a representative. It brings Jefferson onto the level of his constituents, a level that is intentionally distinct from the rest of the nation. Constituent service is an important facet of a member's drive to become indispensable, and Jefferson's constituent service is convincing specifically because he appears to be serving himself when he serves the people of New Orleans-- he *is* his own constituent.

Congressman Jefferson is the first African-American to be elected to the United States Congress from Louisiana. His race serves to reiterate his connection with his constituents. Of the 602,877 citizens living within Jefferson's political district, 365,874 are African-American, representing 60.7 percent of the population.<sup>118</sup> Jefferson ran unopposed in 2000, but in 1998 he won reelection, defeating his white, fellow Democrat opponent with 85.96 percent of the vote, thereby consuming the overwhelming voting base provided by African-Americans in New Orleans.<sup>119</sup> On Capitol Hill, Congressman Jefferson serves as the Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation.<sup>120</sup> This position of congressional leadership further connects Jefferson to New Orleans because it indulges his intimate constituency. The citizens of New Orleans are connected to Congressman Jefferson intimately because he has portrayed himself as one of them. He reiterates this image to the African-American voting block of New Orleans, attempting to convince them that he is the only person on Capitol Hill who understands the specific problems they face. The Caucus does not only bring African-American congressional elites together in the House, but actually utilizes its position to create scholarships, internships, and fellowships on Capitol Hill for minority students interested in politics and

---

<sup>118</sup> Census of Population and Housing, District 2 of Louisiana, 1990. US Census Bureau. [www.census.gov/datamaped/22/02prof.txt](http://www.census.gov/datamaped/22/02prof.txt). 5 March 2002.

<sup>119</sup> Federal Election Results, 1998. Official Election Results by State-- US House of Representatives. Federal Election Commission. [www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe98/lah.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe98/lah.htm). 20 March 2002.

<sup>120</sup> Biography of Congressman William J. Jefferson. [www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm](http://www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm). 20 March 2002.



the Congress.<sup>121</sup> Jefferson's position on the Black Caucus Foundation proves to his original voting block that he is in Washington, DC pursuing the answers to their problems.

Congressman Jefferson's home style, his incorporation of the culture of New Orleans into his electoral strategy, has served him equally well beyond the campaign, to the extent that legislative service can be considered "beyond the campaign." Much of Jefferson's congressional record revolves around the person he has portrayed himself to be and his specific needs. For instance, Jefferson was instrumental in the passage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The AGOA is an "act to authorize a new trade and investment policy for sub-Sahara Africa, expand trade benefits to the countries in the Caribbean Basin, renew the generalized system of preferences, and reauthorize the trade adjustment assistance programs" and Jefferson is a co-sponsor of the bill.<sup>122</sup> This legislation connects Jefferson to his African-American voting base in the same way that strong economic and military support for Israel connects a member to a Jewish voting base. Furthermore, Jefferson has responded legislatively to the Census Bureau statistic that ranked Louisiana in 1998 as the second poorest state in the nation, with 19.1 percent of its population living below the poverty level.<sup>123</sup> He is the sponsor of House Bill number 3774 "to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide a credit to promote homeownership among low-income individuals."<sup>124</sup> Though this bill remains stalled in the House Committee on Ways and Means, Jefferson's sponsorship and support of this legislation directly affects the 228,470 homeowners living within his district.<sup>125</sup> By

---

<sup>121</sup> "Jefferson Elected Black Caucus Chair." *The Advocate*. 8 March 2001. Lexis Nexis.

<sup>122</sup> Bill Summary and Status for the 106th Congress H.R. 434.

[www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d106:1::/temp/~bdHsSw:@@L&summ2=m&/bss/d106query.html](http://www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d106:1::/temp/~bdHsSw:@@L&summ2=m&/bss/d106query.html). 8 March 2001.

<sup>123</sup> State Profile of Louisiana. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999.  
[www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt](http://www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt). 5 March 2002.

<sup>124</sup> Bill Summary and Status for the 107th Congress. H.R. 3774.

[www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d107:6::/temp/~bdsCwG:@@L&summ2=m&/bss/d107query.html](http://www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d107:6::/temp/~bdsCwG:@@L&summ2=m&/bss/d107query.html). 8 March 2002.

<sup>125</sup> Census of Population and Housing, District 2 of Louisiana, 1990. US Census Bureau.  
[www.census.gov/datamaped/22/02prof.txt](http://www.census.gov/datamaped/22/02prof.txt). 5 March 2002.



promoting legislation that further connects him to the people of New Orleans, Jefferson becomes increasingly indispensable.

A man of the people is not the only role Congressman Jefferson plays on Capitol Hill. Even as he portrays himself to his constituents as their next-door neighbor, he does the same for his associates on the Hill, creating a much different neighborhood. Jefferson is so accepted into the world of Washington elites that he can accurately be classified an elite himself. If the average individual who decides to run for the United States Congress is white, male, wealthy, and well educated, Congressman Jefferson is a typical, if even over-qualified, individual lacking only one of the stereotypical attributes. After attending college in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Jefferson went on to receive a law degree from Harvard University Law School. While serving in the House of Representatives Jefferson received his Masters of Laws in Taxation from Georgetown University. This achievement makes Jefferson an elite among elites, as he is only the second congressman in recent history to obtain a degree while serving in the House. His professional life before election to the House was guilded with prestigious achievements, including the creation of the largest predominantly African-American law firm in the South. Jefferson's wife is a doctor and all five of his children, after receiving a New Orleans-based high school education, graduated or are preparing to pursue a degree, from an Ivy League institution.<sup>126</sup> Despite Jefferson's strongest, and ultimately successful, efforts to portray himself as a common man, an average New Orleanian, he has not *become* common. He, in fact, has quite a bit in common with his Hill associates, a fact that has allowed Jefferson to relate to his peers and thus navigate through the processes of debate, compromise, and legislative success easily.

Perhaps the most obvious example of Congressman Jefferson's acceptance of DC insider politics is his position on the House Committee of Ways and Means. Ways and

---

<sup>126</sup>Biography of Congressman William J. Jefferson. [www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm](http://www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm). 20 March 2002.





Means is one of the House's most powerful committees, responsible for application of Article I, sections seven and eight of the U.S. Constitution, which state that the bills for raising revenue must originate in the House of Representatives and that the Congress "has the power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and... To borrow money on the credit of the United States."<sup>127</sup> Jefferson's position on this committee, a position he shares with only sixteen other Democrats, places him at the top of influence and power in Congress. Though Jefferson can spin this position to appear critical to the specific needs of the second district, much as Senator Breaux's power positions have been spun to better relate to Louisiana's overall needs, his place on this important committee demonstrates how far away Jefferson is from the common man of any state. Despite the separation that power creates between Jefferson and his constituents, the Committee on Ways and Means allows Jefferson to further cultivate his common-man status, even as he moves further away. As Jefferson continues to serve on this committee, he becomes more able to sponsor successful monetary legislation geared towards the specific needs of his constituents. His position on Ways and Means thus reiterates his relation to the people of the New Orleans because it enables him to build a legislative record around their desires. His work on H.R. 3774, for instance, was a result of his position on the subcommittee of Select Revenue Measures.<sup>128</sup> The latest activity posted on this bill was its referral to the Committee on the House Ways and Means.<sup>129</sup> Jefferson's service on the Committee allows him to pursue this legislation and follow it through the committee process. Therefore, if and when the bill, or any bill like it, passes the House of Representatives, Jefferson is able to claim credit not only for the authorship of the bill but

---

<sup>127</sup> Committee on Ways and Means, History. US House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means. [www.waysandmeans.house.gov/history.htm](http://www.waysandmeans.house.gov/history.htm). 25 March 2002.

<sup>128</sup> Subcommittee of Select Revenue Measures. US House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means. [www.waysandmeans.house.gov/srm.htm](http://www.waysandmeans.house.gov/srm.htm). 25 March 2002.

<sup>129</sup> Bill Summary and Status for the 107th Congress. H.R. 3774. [www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d107:6::/temp/~bdsCwG:@@/@L&summ2=m&/bss/d107query.html](http://www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d107:6::/temp/~bdsCwG:@@/@L&summ2=m&/bss/d107query.html). 8 March 2002.



also for personally pushing the bill towards passage. Service on this powerful committee allows Jefferson to exert influence over the voters in both Washington and New Orleans. In Washington his position on Ways and Means, and his corresponding ability to deadlock legislation important to nearly any member, enables him to successfully maneuver legislation through the House. His voters in Louisiana are influenced by that passage, convinced that Jefferson is using his position to address the issues he understands are affecting their daily lives.

Ways and Means is not the only way in which Congressman Jefferson has proven his influence within the internal workings of House politics. He also retains positions of leadership within the House that make him an authority among the elites. Congressman Jefferson is the Democratic Party's House Deputy Whip At-Large. He serves on the Democratic Party's Steering Committee and is a member of the Board of Directors of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. As a member of the Democratic National Committee, Jefferson has served as Louisiana's co-chair of the last three presidential campaign committees.<sup>130</sup> Without this type of influence in the House of Representatives, a candidate who was elected based on his ability to understand and relate to the needs of his people would not be able to pursue those needs and create a favorable record of legislative indispensability. He may understand what the needs are, but if a congressman is unable to do anything about those needs than he is useless to his constituents. Jefferson's twin abilities to convince his voters he understands the issues facing them and convince the House he is capable of working within congressional norms puts Jefferson in the optimal position for reelection.

The deliberately dual nature of Congressman Jefferson's personality is the embodiment of rational choice. When at home, or when addressing the citizens of New Orleans, Jefferson *chooses* to be a man of the people and align himself with his audience.

---

<sup>130</sup>Biography of Congressman William J. Jefferson. [www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm](http://www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm). 20 March 2002.



In Washington he makes the other choice, choosing to be powerful and important on Capitol Hill. These two facets of his personality are mutually productive, and one would not work without the other. Jefferson's establishment of himself as a man of the people creates a sense of indispensability, as if he were the only person who could possibly understand the needs of his constituency. The fact that his constituents believe he relates to those needs is a type of constituent service in and of itself and demonstrates how a member's home style can contribute to his reelection goals. However, in the development of Congressman X it was demonstrated that the greatest benefit of incumbency is a member's legislative record, his proof that he has spent his time in Washington achieving something. The only way to build a successful legislative record is to work within the norms and internal politics of the Congress itself, thus requiring Jefferson to cultivate his elitist personality while working on the Hill. Exerting influence over other members of the House enables Jefferson to build such a record and, therefore, actually contributes to his home style appearance as a common man.



## **Congressman X Uncovered**





Congressman X embodies numerous and varying characteristics. These include utilizing rational choice, maximizing the benefits of incumbency, and focusing on reelection. These characteristics create certain political tactics that are applied by members of Congress regardless of state loyalties. Attention to home style, committee selection, roll call records, and constituent services are all utilized by members of Congress with the goal of maintaining and increasing a congressional seat's safety. Though Louisiana may be unique in the needs it requires its congressional delegation to fulfill, the delegation itself is not unique in the ways it attempts to fulfill these needs. There is nothing different in a representative of Louisiana who defends the rights of fisherman than a senator from Michigan who protects the rights of an automobile manufacturer. Even more importantly, the Louisiana delegation is not unique in the reasons it utilizes these popular political techniques. Congressmen from Louisiana, just like those of any other state, must face the voters at reelection. If congressmen from Louisiana, or any other state, are not indispensable, then they will undoubtedly be dispensed. Congressman X and Congressman Jefferson alike must therefore develop and nurture a sense of indispensability among their constituents for the duration of their congressional service.

Senator Breaux, Senator Landrieu, Representative Vitter, and Representative Jefferson each embody several of the characteristics of Congressman X, thus proving that Louisiana's congressional delegation does not differ measurably from the congressmen of congressional literature. Senator Breaux balances authority and constituent service, each under the cover of doing what is best for the state. He simultaneously pursues both his own goals and the goals of his state, shaping his own interests around the interests of Louisiana in an attempt to satisfy them both. Senator Landrieu, without the freedom that comes with safety that is maintained by Senator Breaux, demonstrates that a member's entire focus is generated around reelection. She has used all of Congressman X's political tactics to ensure the safety of her seat. Congressman Vitter, in many ways, is Congressman X, attempting to combine *all* of X's characteristics into one person. Congressman Jefferson,



on the other hand, focuses, perhaps unknowingly, on the separate spheres of home and DC so that the two mutually benefit his own best interests. Each of these individuals shape their behavior around the proximate goal of reelection. Their dominating obligation, therefore, is to the voters of Louisiana. Delegates from different areas are likewise forced to pursue reelection and are also obligated to their voters. Though the voters may change, the obligation and the expectation that a member will serve his constituents do not disappear.

Congressman X is a fictional character, created on paper to prove a specific point. It is practically impossible to assume that every characteristic of Congressman X is readily absorbed into the personalities of every congressman. Like many fictional characters, however, Congressman X is based on reality and the realization that most of his characteristics are absorbed and applied by most members of Congress. A compilation of popular congressional theory can, and perhaps should, serve as a guide to every citizen's congressman, a type of "Congressional Behavior for Dummies." There is much debate regarding the arrival of C-SPAN as a political force and how its creation has served to diminish positive public opinion regarding Congress. The basic argument is similar to the one made of sausage making, that no one wants to see how legislation is made, they simply want to enjoy the results. However, studies show that Americans who are unhappy with Congress are typically upset with the collection of members who make up Congress, not the institution itself. In fact, "24 percent of the population approve of Congress the collection of members, whereas 88 percent approve of Congress the permanent institution."<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, individuals polled typically admit that they are "truly fond of [their] own representative but quite unhappy with the collection of members."<sup>132</sup> The public, therefore, in documenting its disappointment with the Congress is disappointed to

---

<sup>131</sup> John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes Toward American Political Institutions*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). p.106.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.* p.117.



see the processes by which the institution is run. These processes are the essential behavioral characteristic of Congressman X: compromise, personality mutations, rational choice, and congressional careerism.

It would seem to follow that a greater understanding of congressional behavior, with all its intentions, schemes, and spins, would produce even more discontent in the public with regards to Congress. Citizens who understand Congress as a collection of members would seemingly only be proven correct in their estimation of democracy's processes. Increased understanding, however, would not undermine Congress' respect or authority. To the contrary, it should increase positive opinions among citizens with regards to Congress by demonstrating how brilliantly the system works. The very fact that congressmen are dedicated to their own reelection goals and deliberately shape their behavior around those goals works to the benefit of all Americans. A member, regardless of his intentions, who does not behave in a way favorable to his constituents will not win reelection. Therefore, he chooses his legislation, his committees, even his very personality around a prediction of where favor that lies. Even campaign finance, in this era of big money campaigns, is raised with a careful understanding of where constituent interests lie. Voting, in American democracy, is still a candidate's most important currency. It is true that congressional behavior is deliberately shaped around a member's own goals. It is true that Congress is not simply a collection of members working towards the needs of the citizens alone. Congressmen are indeed working towards their own needs. What is also true, however, is that even as congressmen work in favor of their own needs and to achieve their own goals, they are necessarily required to work towards the needs and goals of their constituents. If these needs, those of the citizens themselves, were not met, the goals of congressmen (reelection) would not be met either. For their own job security, therefore, congressmen accurately fill their responsibilities as representatives, through a series of specific and rational behavioral tactics aimed at pleasing those whom they represent. Increased understanding of this aspect of the American political system would only serve



to prove to disenchanted and unbelieving citizens that accountability in Congress is alive and well.





## **Bibliography**



- About Mary-- Committees. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/committees.htm](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/committees.htm). 23 February 2002.
- Anderson, Ed. "Vitter Envisions a Rough Campaign." *The Times Picayune*. 10 March 2002. Lexis Nexis.
- Alpert, Bruce. "Breaux Finds Himself Under Fire from Both Sides in the Senate; His Centrist Approach May Be to Blame." *The Times Picayune*. 9 May 2001. Lexis Nexis.
- Arnold, R. Douglas. *Congress and the Bureaucracy: A Theory of Influence*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
- Bill Search, 107th Congress. [www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov). 20 March 2002.
- Bill Summary and Status for the 106th Congress H.R. 434.  
[www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d106:1:/temp/~bdHsSw:@@L&sum m2=m&/bss/d106query.html](http://www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d106:1:/temp/~bdHsSw:@@L&sum m2=m&/bss/d106query.html). 8 March 2001.
- Bill Summary and Status for the 107th Congress. H.R. 3774.  
[www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d107:6:/temp/~bdsCwG:@@L&sum m2=m&/bss/d107query.html](http://www.thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquerytr/D?d107:6:/temp/~bdsCwG:@@L&sum m2=m&/bss/d107query.html). 8 March 2002.
- Biography of Congressman David Vitter. [www.vitter.house.gov/bio.asp](http://www.vitter.house.gov/bio.asp). 25 March 2002.
- Biography of Congressman William J. Jefferson.  
[www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm](http://www.house.gov/jefferson/biography.htm). 10 March 2002.
- Biography of Senator Mary Landrieu. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu/biography](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/biography). 23 February 2002.
- Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. H.R. 2356. US Senate Roll Call Votes.  
[www.senate.gov/legislative/vote1072/vote\\_00054.html](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/vote1072/vote_00054.html). 20 March 2002.
- "Breaux and Landrieu Announce Budget Victories for Louisiana." Senator Mary Landrieu. [www.landrieu.senate.gov/releases](http://www.landrieu.senate.gov/releases). 20 March 2002.



“BreauX Urges Indonesian Ambassador to Buy Louisiana Rice.” Senator John BreauX. [www.senate.gov/~breauX/releases/2002321B38.html](http://www.senate.gov/~breauX/releases/2002321B38.html). 21 March 2002.

“Btu Tax-- A Better Way.” *The Times Picayune*. 22 May 1993. Lexis Nexis.

Census of Population and Housing, District 1 of Louisiana,1990. US Census Bureau. [www.census.gov/datamaped/22/01prof.txt](http://www.census.gov/datamaped/22/01prof.txt). 5 March 2002.

Census of Population and Housing, District 2 of Louisiana,1990. US Census Bureau. [www.census.gov/datamaped/22/02prof.txt](http://www.census.gov/datamaped/22/02prof.txt). 5 March 2002.

Coleman, Thomas B. “Praises BreauX.” *The Times Picayune*. July 15, 1993. Lexis Nexis.

Committee on Ways and Means, History. US House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means. [www.waysandmeans.house.gov/history.htm](http://www.waysandmeans.house.gov/history.htm). 25 March 2002.

Constituent Services of Congressman David Vitter. [www.vitter.house.gov/Constituent Services.asp](http://www.vitter.house.gov/ConstituentServices.asp). 25 March 2002.

Davis, Edwin Adams. *Louisiana: The Pelican State*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959).

Davidson, Roger H. and Walter J. Oleszek. *Congress and Its Members*. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1990).

FEC Candidate Summary Reports-- Landrieu, Mary L. Federal Election Commission. [www.herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/cancomsrs/?\\_02+S6LA00227](http://www.herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/cancomsrs/?_02+S6LA00227). 25 March 2002.

FEC Candidate Summary Report-- Vitter, David B. Federal Election Commission. [www.herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/cancomsrs/?\\_02+HOLA01079](http://www.herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/cancomsrs/?_02+HOLA01079). 25 March 2002.

FEC Disclosure Reports-- Committees Who Gave to Landrieu, Mary L. Federal Election Commission. [http://herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/can\\_give/S6LA00227](http://herndon1.sdrdc.com/cgi-bin/can_give/S6LA00227). 25 March 2002.

Federal Election Results, 1996. Official Election Results by State-- US Senate. Federal



- Election Commission. [www.fec.gov/pubrec/senate.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/senate.htm). 20 March 2002.
- Federal Election Results, 1998. Official Election Results by State-- US Senate. Federal Election Commission. [www.fec.gov/pubrec/senate.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/senate.htm). 20 March 2002.
- Federal Election Results, 1998. Official Election Results by State-- US House of Representatives. [www.fec.gov/pubrec/hc2000/lah.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/hc2000/lah.htm). 20 March 2002.
- Federal Election Results, 1996. Votes Cast by Party for the US Senate. Federal Election Commission. [www.fec.gov/pubrec/partysen.htm](http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/partysen.htm). 20 March 2002.
- Fenno, Richard F., Jr. *Congressmen In Committees*. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1973).
- Fenno, Richard. *The Emergence of a Senate Leader: Pete Domenici and the Reagan Budget*. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1991).
- Fenno, Richard F., Jr. *Learning to Govern: An Institutional View of the 104th Congress*. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 1997).
- Fenno, Richard. *Learning to Legislate: The Senate Education of Arlen Specter*. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1991).
- Fenno, Richard. *The Making of a Senator: Dan Quayle*. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1989).
- Fiorina, Morris P. and David W. Rhode, eds *Home Style and Washington Work: Studies of Congressional Politics*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).
- Fiorina, Morris P. *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
- Fowler, Linda L. and Robert D. McClure. *Political Ambition: Who Decides to Run for Congress*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
- Fram, Alan. "Louisiana's Breaux in Key Position to Affect Outcome of Bush Tax Cut." *The Sunday Advocate*. 29 April 2001. Lexis Nexis.
- Froman, Louis A. Jr. *Congressmen and Their Constituencies*. (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1963).





Grace, Stephanie. "Vitter Ready to Put House Staff Together; Victor Waiting for Treen to Call." *The Times Picayune*. 31 May 1999. Lexis Nexis.

Income and Poverty Status in 1989: 1990. US Census Bureau.

90STF3\_DP4&\_geo\_id=04000US22. 5 March 2002.

J. Bennett Johnston, Jr.

[www.bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=J000189](http://www.bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=J000189). 23 February 2002.

"Jefferson Elected Black Caucus Chair." *The Advocate*. 8 March 2001. Lexis Nexis.

Johannes, John R. *To Serve the People: Congress and Constituency Service*.

(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

Key, V.O. *Southern Politics: In State and Nation*. (New York: Alfred Knopf Inc., 1949).

Kurtz, Michael L., ed. *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana*

*History*. Volume IX. (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1998).

Labor Force Status and Employment Characteristics: 1990. US Census Bureau.

[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsTable?\\_lang=en&\\_vt\\_name=DEC\\_1990\\_STF3\\_DP3&\\_geo\\_id=04000US22](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/BasicFactsTable?_lang=en&_vt_name=DEC_1990_STF3_DP3&_geo_id=04000US22). 5 March 2002.

Leading Agricultural Commodities and US Ranking of Cash Receipts, 1995. LEAP.

[www.leap.nlu.edu/STAAB/Chap11/TAB1113.txt](http://www.leap.nlu.edu/STAAB/Chap11/TAB1113.txt). 21 March 2002.

Loomis, Burdett A. *The Contemporary Congress*. (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2000).

Mary Landrieu's Team. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/staff.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/staff.cfm). 23 February 2002.

Matthews, Chris. *Hardball: How Politics is Played, Told by One that Knows the Game*.

(New York: Simon and Schuster Publishing, 1988).

Mayhew, David. *Party Loyalty Among Congressmen: The Difference Between*

*Democrats and Republicans, 1947-1962*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University



Press, 1966).

Mayhew, David. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

McKinney, Joan. "Louisiana Regaining Congressional Clout." *The Morning Advocate*. 6 January 2001. Lexis Nexis.

McQuaid, John. "La Energy Interests Lobby Against Dead Btu Tax." *The Times Picayune*. June 11, 1993. Lexis Nexis.

"More Clout in Congress." *The Times Picayune*. 11 January 2001. Lexis Nexis.

"New Law Smooths the Road to International Adoption." Senator Mary Landrieu.

[www.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/columns/intladoption.html](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/columns/intladoption.html). 20 March 2002.

Oceans and Fisheries Subcommittee. Science, Transportation, and Commerce Committee.

[www.senate.gov/%7Ecommerce/issues/ocfish.htm](http://www.senate.gov/%7Ecommerce/issues/ocfish.htm). 8 February 2002.

Olson, Mancur. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

Parker, Glenn R. *Homeward Bound: Explaining Changes in Congressional Behavior*. (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986).

"Poll: Incumbent Landrieu Remains Heavy Favorite for Senate." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. 13 January 2002. Lexis Nexis.

Polsby, Nelson W., ed. *Congressional Behavior*. (New York: Random House Publishing, 1971).

Roll Call Votes, 107th Session. Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives.

[www.clerkweb.house.gov/evs/2001/Roll\\_400.asp](http://www.clerkweb.house.gov/evs/2001/Roll_400.asp) 25 March 2002

"Senate passes Landrieu Amendment to Double Adoption Tax Credit." Senator Mary Landrieu. [www.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/01/2001524A50.html](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/releases/01/2001524A50.html). 20 March 2002.

Senator John Breaux. [www.senate.gov/~breaux](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux). 8 February 2002.

Senator John Breaux--Biography. [www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux/bio.html). 8 February 2000.



“Senator Breaux’s Statement on Louisiana Governor’s Race.” Senator John Breaux.

[www.senate.gov/~breaux/releases/2002104808.html](http://www.senate.gov/~breaux/releases/2002104808.html). 3 January 2002.

Sinclair, Barbara. *The Transformation of the US Senate*. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

State and County Quick Facts. US Census Bureau.

[www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/22000.html). 5 March 2000.

State Profile of Louisiana. Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999.

[www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt](http://www.census.gov/statab/www/states/la.txt). 5 March 2002.

“Steps to Success.” Senator Mary Landrieu.

[www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/steps.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/~landrieu/newsite/steps.cfm). 20 March 2002.

Stewart, Charles III. *Analyzing Congress*. (New York: WW Norton and Co., 2001).

Subcommittee of Select Revenue Measures. US House of Representatives

Committee on Ways and Means. [www.waysandmeans.house.gov/srm.htm](http://www.waysandmeans.house.gov/srm.htm). 25 March 2002.

Turner, Julius. *Party and Constituency: Pressures on Congress*. (Baltimore, MD:

The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1951).

Walsh, Bill. “State May have Large Contingent in Bush Administration.” *The Times Picayune*. 17 December 2000. Lexis Nexis.

Walsh, Edward. “Four new Southern Senators Owe Victories to Black Vote:

Allegiance to Democrats as High as 90%.” *The Washington Post*. 7 November 1986. Lexis Nexis.

Welcome, from Congressman William J. Jefferson.

[www.house.gov/jefferson/welcome.htm](http://www.house.gov/jefferson/welcome.htm). 10 March 2002.











